Sanjeev Kumar

Mr. Sanjeev Kumar is Chairman of the Shivlee Trust, a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, and an esteemed independent researcher and numismatist, who has devoted his life to studying Gupta Dynasty history and numismatics. He is regarded as one of the leading authorities and researchers on Gupta Dynasty coinage.

Kumar's fascination with Gupta coinage began when he was a young boy growing up in India. Lured by the tales of the Gupta kings, the legendary Vikramādityaḥ, their exploits and treasures, led him to a lifelong pursuit of these golden monuments to India's Golden Age and what they could reveal about its history and culture. The fruits of this labor will help all to fully appreciate the beauty of Ancient India.

The first edition of this book was released at the National Museum in Delhi by the Minister of Culture for India, Dr. Mahesh Sharma along with the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, National Museum Delhi, and the Archeological Society of India. This book was released subsequently also by Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India.

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Coin number 1058 from the Shivlee Collection

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9 798218 457785 90000

Between the 4th and 6th centuries AD, the Gupta Dynasty rose to prominence as the main authority in control of much of Northern and Central India. This era of Gupta rule brought about significant and lasting changes across the Indian subcontinent. This book takes a fresh look at this historical period, uncovering insights from the Gupta's extensive use of coins, especially those made of gold and silver. These coins are like hidden treasures, telling stories through their beautiful artwork. By carefully examining coins, royal seals, and inscriptions, this book meticulously pieces together the story of this remarkable period in Indian history.

Printed in India

MRP: INR 12,500

2ND EDITION

TREASURES OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

Sanjeev Kumar

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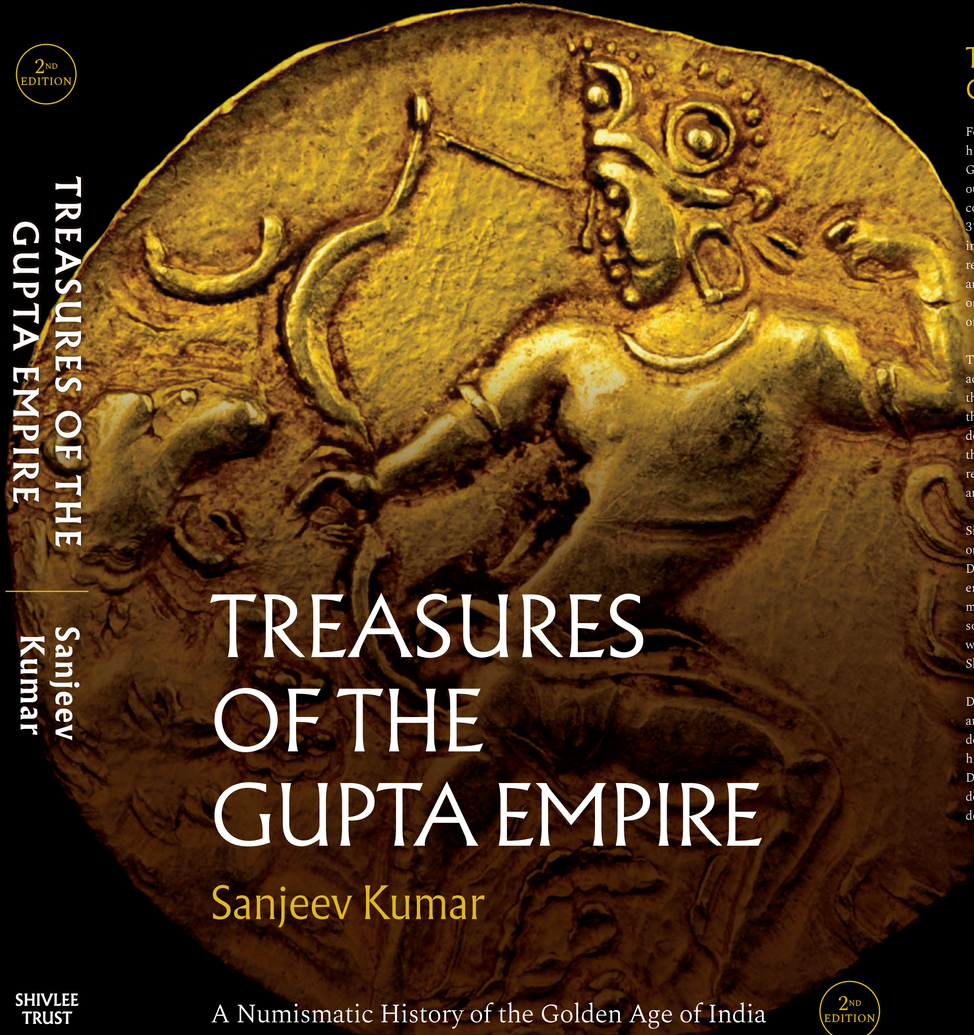

TREASURES OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

Sanjeev Kumar

A Numismatic History of the Golden Age of India

2ND EDITION

TREASURES OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

For over 2,000 years, coins have been a part of India's history. But among them, the gold coins issued by the Gupta Dynasty from the 4th to the 6th centuries AD stand out for their stunning beauty and intricate designs. These coins, minted during the reigns of Chandragupta I in AD 319 through Viṣṇugupta in AD 543, offer a unique glimpse into the evolution of the Gupta style and its influence on religious art during India's Golden Age. By decoding the artistic designs, Brāhmī legends, dates, and iconography on these coins, we can reconstruct the fascinating history of the dynasty.

The first edition of this book has been universally accepted as an authoritative work, and has now become the standard reference for the Gupta Dynasty coinage. In this second edition, the entire Gupta coinage has been documented, classification has been updated, and rarity of the coins has been identified. New findings based on latest research helps to provide a revised chronology using dates and data from coins, inscriptions, seals and copper plates.

Since Dr. A. S. Altekar's comprehensive catalog in 1957, no one had attempted to document the entire series of Gupta Dynasty coinage. This new book now carries on with that endeavor. It features the entire corpus of the rarest coins, many of which are being published for the first time, sourced from major museum collections worldwide as well as private collections, including the prestigious Shivlee Collection.

Designed as a guidebook for history enthusiasts, scholars, and collectors, 'Treasures of the Gupta Empire' aims to deepen understanding of the Gupta Dynasty's intricate history. It serves as a comprehensive reference on Gupta Dynasty numismatics. The depth of the research documented within will help scholars and researchers for decades to come.

Treasures of the Gupta Empire

Treasures of the Gupta Empire

A Numismatic History
of the Golden Age of India

Second Edition

Sanjeev Kumar

Praise for the First Edition

Sanjeev Kumar's *Treasures of the Gupta Empire* is the first attempt at a comprehensive type catalogue of Gupta coins for fifty years. Implicitly, it is a replacement for Allan and Altekar both in content (with a lot of new material in the last half century) and in terms of organization (also supported by a great deal of new scholarship).

As a comprehensive reference on the gold coinage of the Gupta's it is no doubt a huge contribution. The enlarged images, relative ease of use, and comprehensive nature, will likely ensure the volume supplants any of its predecessors as the catalogue of choice. This is a volume that I would recommend as a standard reference to anyone with an interest in Gupta coinage.

—Robert Bracey, Curator, British Museum
***Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* No. 230.**

It is the best book ever written on Gupta coinage, surpassing Ellen Raven's work, which was the standard book on the subject. The book is well written and beautifully illustrated. Above all, it is a complete corpus, making it a magnum opus.

—Prof. Osmund-Christie Bopearachchi, University of California-Berkeley
Emeritus Director of Research, French National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris
CNRS-ENS, UMR 8546, Archéologies d'Orient et d'Occident.

His book on the imperial Guptas is a must-read.

—Prof. K. K. Thaplyal, Former Head of Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Lucknow. Visiting Fellow at the Banaras Hindu University, Vikram University, and Kurukshetra University.

If I am travelling again in the direction of coins now, it is because a meticulously worked, richly illustrated, recently published book on the *Treasures of the Gupta Empire* landed on my desk a few weeks ago. Put together by Sanjeev Kumar, it is truly a comprehensive catalogue of the gold and silver coins of the Guptas.

—B. N. Goswamy, Indian Art Critic and Historian.

The first edition of *Treasures of the Gupta Empire* turned out to be an indispensable tool without which serious research on Gupta history is not possible any longer. For classical questions, it provides new answers, and more importantly, it prompts you to develop new questions of your own. It is a visual delight.

—Harry Falk, Professor of Indology at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Director of the Institute of Indian Philology and Art History at the Free University in Berlin.

Treasures of the Gupta Empire is more than just a thorough and comprehensive catalogue of the stunning world of Gupta coinages—it is a visual delight! Paging through the book is a breathtaking journey through history engraved on coins of exceptional craftsmanship and highest artistic standards. We follow the fortunes of the dynasty with fascination, the campaigns, the politically motivated marriages, the rapid expansion and finally the rise to the dominant dynasty of northern India for more than two centuries. The Golden Age of India's numismatic history has never before been described and illustrated so beautifully!

—Dr. Wilfried Pieper, Eminent Numismatist and Author of Ancient Indian Coins.

Sanjeev Kumar treads the path of numismatic stalwarts like John Allan, A. S. Altekar, and P. L. Gupta in offering a most up-to-date survey of Gupta coinage in his *Treasures of the Gupta Empire*. While improving on earlier typologies, this book also offers insights into lesser researched aspects of Gupta coins such as metallurgy using state-of-the-art analytical techniques. It helps to improve our understanding of what was an epochal period in Indian history and paves the way for future interdisciplinary and advanced research.

—Shailendra Bhandare, Curator of South Asian and Far-Eastern Coins and Paper Money, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Sanjeev has not only brought forward an updated catalog of the Gupta coinage, but he has also ventured to offer detailed research on metal analysis and XRF studies, dates on Gupta coins and inscriptions, hoards of the Gupta coins, and transition of Kuṣāṇa designs into that of the Guptas.

The numismatic community must thank Sanjeev for publishing all the known and unknown varieties of Gupta gold coins and those of the later Bengal rulers in one place.

—Dr. Prashant P. Kulkarni, President, Indian Coin Society
Vice President, The Numismatic Society of India
Former Regional Secretary, The Oriental Numismatic Society.

...a quintessential guide, comprehensive and intuitive, full representation of coins from private collections and museums in India and across the world.

—*Coins Weekly*, December 15, 2016.

It goes to the credit of Sanjeev Kumar to publish the most comprehensive catalogue of the Gupta coins including all coin-types published earlier and preserved in numerous museums of the world and even unpublished ones in some museums, personal and individual collections.

Chapters on Gupta history, genealogical and chronological tables, evolution of designs and motifs, metrology and metal analysis, trade routes, etc., serve as significant background for the study of coins issued by the Gupta emperors which of course forms the most important and valuable part of the work followed by late and post-Gupta and Kidarite Kāśmīr coinages.

Treasures of the Gupta Empire gives a virtual glimpse of the "Golden Age." It is useful not only to scholars and savants but also to the collectors and dealers to determine new types or varieties. Sanjeev Kumar deserves congratulations for this comprehensive and beautifully brought out volume.

—Devendra Handa, Editor-in-Chief, *Numismatic Digest***.**

The book is the most comprehensive survey of Gupta coinage attempted to date and invites the reader to appreciate the design and style innovations in a spectacular coinage produced during three-centuries of history often described as India's golden age. In addition to scholars and collectors, the book appeals to a wide range of interests. Students of Indian culture history, political history, art history, comparative religions, and numismatics will all find treasures to contemplate in over 400 pages of text and images. Kumar's passion is to fill numerous gaps and correct mistakes found in previous publications. That this history is revealed in Kumar's combination of ambitious text and detailed analysis of coin design is a landmark achievement.

—David Jongeward, author of *Kushan, Kushano-Sasanian, and Kidarite Coins from the American Numismatic Society*.

Published in the UK by

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Summertown Pavilion
18–24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG
www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-795-0 (Archaeopress hardcover edition)
ISBN 978-1-80327-796-7 (Archaeopress ebook)

Published in India by

THE SHIVLEE TRUST

www.shivlee.com

ISBN 979-8-218-45778-5 (India hardcover edition)

© Sanjeev Kumar 2024
Second edition published September 2024
First edition published January 2017

MRP: INR 12,500

Front Cover Coin:
Samudragupta I Tiger-Slayer Type, Coin number 1058 from the Shivlee Collection

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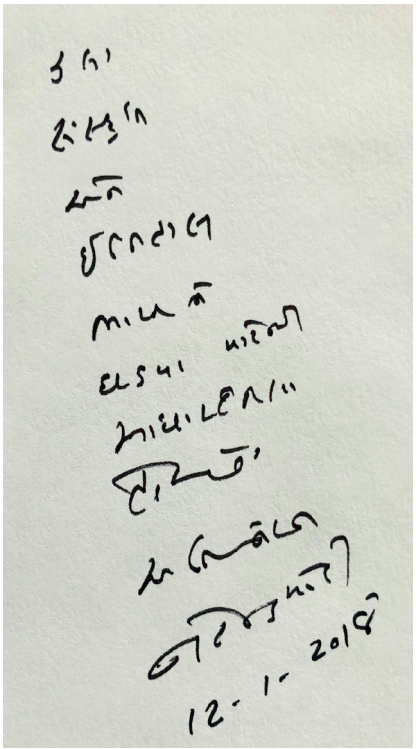

"Art, culture and history are the foundation stones of India. Congratulations."
—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, 12 January 2018

Foreword to the Second Edition

The Gupta period is remarkable for development in the fields of art, science, and literature, and for that reason has been labelled as the "Classical Age" and the "Golden Age" in Indian history. The gold coins of the Guptas, found in large numbers, are evidence of the prosperity of the people, and have contributed in some measure in labelling the age as "golden."

It was generally believed that after the publication of the catalogue dealing with of the coins of the Gupta dynasty in the British Museum by John Allan (1914), and the *Corpus of Indian Coins*, vol. IV, by A. S. Altekar (1957), all the types of the gold coins are known and their interpretations are settled. Sanjeev Kumar's work, *Treasures of the Gupta Empire*, is one such example which shows that new types have been found and new interpretations are possible.

The learned author does not base his study on the photographs of coins published in books and journals, which is the most common practice, but has made a first-hand study of the Gupta coins located in various museums and private collections in India and abroad. A remarkable feature of his work is the inclusion of excellent photographs of the coins, which make one feel as if he or she is seeing the actual coins. He has done a great service to the cause of numismatic studies, as the photographs will be of a great help to scholars engaged in the study of Gupta coins. He has critically discussed the views of different scholars relating to the identification of the devices and legends on the coins and their interpretations, has shown agreement or disagreement with them, and has given reason for that; and in a number of cases offers new identification and interpretation.

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Foreword to the First Edition

The unification of kingdoms and political control over a vast territory of the Indian subcontinent during the rule of the Gupta emperors brought about peace and prosperity and enabled the pursuit of scientific, literary, and artistic manifestations marking the time span as the Classical Age of Indian history. This Golden Age of India is credited for extensive inventions and discoveries in science, technology, engineering, medicine, art, architecture, dialectic, logic, literature, mathematics, astronomy, religion, and philosophy. The creative genius of the Guptas is also reflected in their coinage, which has become a source of study of art, economy, political history, and religion.

John Allan's catalogue (1914) on Gupta coins and A. S. Altekar's book, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire* (1957), were landmark studies on Gupta numismatics. Based on Altekar's classification, other catalogues subsequently appeared, but all of them were primarily concerned with distinct collections or hoards. We must compliment Sri Sanjeev Kumar for publishing the present volume, which comprehensively incorporates each known coin type of the Imperial Guptas and later Guptas as well as other contemporary dynasties.

One can imagine the hard work and professional excellence involved in compiling this work, which the author has completed after his study of collections in various museums and institutions as well as in many private collections both in India and abroad. He has compared the coinage and has also analyzed various connected issues. Before the beginning of the catalogue of coins of individual rulers, the author has devoted a considerable part of the book to significant notes on designs and art, chronology, metrology, metal analysis, and weights.

I wish and hope that the present work will become an index of Gupta coinage and would certainly get attention of scholars and general readers.

B. R. Mani
Director General
National Museum, New Delhi Ministry of Culture
Government of India

Foreword to the First Edition

The coins of the Gupta Empire provide vital evidence for our understanding of the history of ancient India. They are the most numerous surviving official documents of this important period in the development of India as a nation. During the Gupta period Indian imperial power became defined in new ways and the ancient religions of India became focussed through imperial patronage into the forms we now recognize as Hinduism. It was a period that has been justly described by many as a "golden age."

In spite of its importance, knowledge of this great empire only re-emerged from the mists of the past in the nineteenth century when scholars began to recognise its place in India's history. These scholars discovered the inscriptions erected in the names of Gupta emperors and at the same time recognised the coins issued by their administrations. By the early twentieth century an outline history had been constructed from these two sources with the addition of the unclear references in contemporary literature, archaeological excavations and art datable to their period.

Gupta India emerged as a period when a great empire ruled across a large part of northern India and its patronage promoted the creation of great art and literature. Within its realm Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism flourished and gave rise to a new style of art which spread into all the surrounding regions: east into Burma and Thailand, south into Andhra and Śrī Laṅka, north into Nepal and Tibet, and west into Afghanistan and central Asia. The same art created a coinage of great beauty and complexity.

This new volume marks another stage in the development of a modem understanding of that coinage as one of the key components in the construction of a history of the Gupta Empire. Although there have been many publications on Gupta coins, Sanjeev Kumar is here taking what is only the third important step in presenting the Gupta coinage in a framework rendering the data preserved by the coins in an accessible form. He now pushes forward the work done by John Allan (1914) and A. S. Altekar (1957), integrating into their achievements a wide range of coins not known to those scholars, together with new approaches to typological, metallurgical and metrological analysis which open up new aspects of research.

I congratulate Sanjeev Kumar in this ambitious restatement of the historical and cultural importance of Gupta coinage. Like the work of Allan and Altekar, this volume, this giant step, will remain an authoritative tool for documenting one of the most important periods in the history of India for decades.

Joe Cribb
Retired Keeper of Coins and Medals, British Museum
Secretary General, Oriental Numismatic Society

Author's Note to the Second Edition

I must confess, the task of working up an updated manuscript for this second edition had been foremost in my mind for the past five years, but the effort and time involved in trying to get this done seemed impossible. I am still not fully clear on how I was able to literally put my (and my wife's) life on hold for almost four years while trying to write the manuscript for the first edition that was finished in 2016 and released at the National Museum in Delhi in January 2017.

This journey started about five decades back when I was on a summer visit to Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. My father was a career army officer and at that time was the Commanding Officer of the Third Madras Regiment including during the 1971 war with Pakistan. After his tenure as the CO for the Third Madras, he decided he would finally finish his Masters in History at Meerut University in his hometown. I had accompanied him to Meerut during this time and my sole job was keep making fresh cups of coffee, to keep him going strong studying for the Masters. It was then that he gave me his own coin collection that my grandmother—my *dadi*—had stored safely at the bottom of a huge steel trunk that among other things was the main repository of all things related to woolens and blankets. Going through this amazing collection of coins, many of which my father had acquired over the years from his own father and grandfather, was quite a treat. Coins that one only dreamed of seeing in books or museums I could now hold in my own little hands. It was at that time that I think I fell in love and was bitten with the bug that infects all coin collectors, a lifelong illness from which there is no escape.

In 1981, I immigrated to the United States as a student and over the next four decades channeled my passion for collecting coins of a very specific dynasty—the Guptas—that were largely ignored by most collectors or scholars in numismatics. I was largely attracted to these coins because of their incredible art and designs. I could not understand why as a young student growing up in India in the 1970s, there was hardly any discussion in our textbooks on these beautiful works of art. Greek and Roman art was rightly celebrated, but these amazing designs seen on these little pieces of gold was largely absent.

During the 1980s and '90s, it was very common to find Kuṣāṇa coins because they were popular with collectors and quite readily available at US and European coins shows and in coin auction catalogs. Gupta dynasty coins or for that matter ancient Indian coinage, did not elicit the same level of interest. It seems no one was seriously collecting them; hence, these were not easily available. Every now and then, a few coins would show up when senior collectors or estates sold their collections. Even books on ancient India coinage were not easily available and those that were around were mostly outdated, written many decades back.

Over the years, the collecting bug morphed into studying and researching these beautiful coins, to better understand the hidden symbolism: what does the iconography on the coins mean; what was the message being conveyed with the legends written on the coins in the ancient Brāhmī script? It was clear that there were clues hidden in these coins, but what these were remained a mystery. It was clear that these coins could help solve many of the questions posed by scholars decades back, a complex, multi-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that was waiting to be solved. Trying to answer the questions that arose from this multi-decade study using the clues hidden within these coins became an exciting journey, and that is what this book is all about.

In search of answers, it was clear that I needed to physically handle the coins in question. The main books on Gupta coins (Altekar, Allan, etc.) only showed tiny images of the coins in black and white. Studying the minute details, traces of legends, or symbols, dates, and iconography hidden on these tiny coins was hard and grueling work. Unfortunately, most collectors and museums were

unwilling to allow researchers full access, let alone perform metal analysis. To fully study the coins, it became abundantly clear that I had to purchase the coins and collections outright as they came up for sale. Many times it was not fully clear to me what or how important a worn lead coin might be, but knowing that it must somehow fit into the complex puzzle, I picked it up as it was offered. It was important to build a large sample size and database and I needed to get my hands on available coins. Thus, I acquired entire Gupta coin collections from major senior collectors such as William Spengler, Bill Warden, Jan Lingen, Alex Fishman, and many others. My offer was simple: if you had a Gupta coin collection, I wanted it.

Why? Because I recognized the need to create a database with accurate data, which would be large and complete enough to facilitate a comprehensive study. While public collections were somewhat accessible, coins in private collections could help fill in the gaps. This undertaking was very expensive but worthwhile, as it promised to solve one of the biggest enigmas of India's rich history.

Each coin struck by the Gupta kings is full of information, that in the hands of an experienced student can tell you a beautiful story. The coin design can give clues to the religious leanings of that king, and the design of the body, the style, can point to a specific mint. The iconography of the coin, the scene portrayed, can shed light on what was of paramount importance to the king at that time in his reign, whether he was getting ready to vanquish the armies of the kingdoms spread across the Gangetic plains, or the northern and eastern kingdoms where the rhinoceros are found. The dates on the silver and lead coins could help fill in the gaps, the solitary coins from kings known to us via inscriptions or in many cases unknown up to now, all reveal hidden details which can help fill the gaps in our history.

The legends in Brāhmī script on the coins give us clues to the rulers' ambitions and desires; the metal content itself can be a testament to the economic state at that time. All of this data however, cannot be looked at in isolation. Reviewing a collection of a specific museum—no matter how extensive—will only yield results specific to that collection. That is why a full comprehensive study was needed, and this book accomplishes this requirement.

The reality was that no one had even attempted taking on such a monumental task. It was and still is a very expensive undertaking. To get permission to have long-locked Indian museum vaults opened for study is still not possible. While I was fortunate to get such access from a few of the major museums in India, most scholars will never have this option. Realizing this early on, I was determined to ensure that a full comprehensive book covering India's most famous dynasty and its rich history was published. It was my duty to India to get this almost impossible job done. It took three decades of research and four years of eighteen-hour days, every single day, to prepare the manuscript.

In January 2017, first edition of the book was released at the National Museum in Delhi by the Minister of Culture Dr. Mahesh Sharma as well as by Dr. Tiwari, Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, Dr. K. N. Dikshit, Director General of the Archaeological Society of India, and Dr. B. R. Mani, Director General of the National Museum.

Subsequently, this book was brought to the attention of the honorable Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, who then invited me to his residence to felicitate me on the completion of this book. A fifteen-minute scheduled event went on for almost an hour-and-a-half. I had expected a simple meet-and-greet, but I was amazed at how thoughtful and deep the questions were that he posed to me. He had gone through the book prior to the meeting, and was genuinely interested in many of the developments during this period of our history. He was fascinated by the fact that someone sitting outside of India could write such an important book for India, and wanted to know what obstacles I had faced during my journey in preparing this manuscript. I was not prepared for this, but I did mention the need to open access for researchers like me, to digitize the museum collections and manuscripts in India so they are readily available online for easy access

to all no matter where a researcher was located. I also relayed to him how the archaic policy of restricting photographs in museums needs to be changed. Researchers and students should not be restricted from taking a simple photograph of a stone inscription or a sculpture. A few months later, a new policy was announced. All museums in India and all archaeological sites under ASI would allow photography with immediate effect. In the next year's budget and subsequent years, funds were allocated to further expand the online museum portal with an intense effort to digitize all the major museum collections and manuscripts. To what extent my unplanned lobbying effort helped make the case, I do not know. What I do know is that thanks to these new initiatives, India's rich collections are now more accessible to researchers than ever before, whether they are in a village in India or anywhere else in the world with an internet connection.

This book took many years of research and continuous eighteen-hour days to complete and update this second edition. It has been gratifying to see that the data provided in the first edition, served as a valuable resource for scholars and collectors. Even more gratifying is that with the release of the book, it renewed an interest in the history of the Gupta Dynasty and helped start fresh conversations and groundbreaking research.

History is always written by the victors. The gap between what was fact versus reality during the Gupta period, is what this book addresses. In some cases, historical facts written by the victors and the evidence from inscriptions and coins can lead to very different conclusions, and in many cases create conflicting narratives. Solving the mystery of ancient India is like walking through a dark tunnel with occasional glimpses of light and fleeting clues that can help us reconstruct the true story. Coins issued by victors and vanquished alike, speak volumes, and the research presented within is about piecing together evidence from the coins issued by the kings ruling over the Gupta Empire.

This book is a work of love and passion. In fact, the original title of the original manuscript was "A Love Affair." Like all passionate journeys, first one must fall in love. I fell in love with these beautiful coins at a very young age. Their intricate designs, the action scenes, symbolism, the iconic kings of ancient India—all this fascinated me as a young child, and I marveled at the coin collections showcased in the Coin Gallery at the National Museum in Delhi. My hope is that the beautiful designs of the coins and the decades of research summarized and presented in this book will continue to shine a bright light on the mystery that is India, to help inspire and fuel the imaginations of the children of India and future generations who can continue to dream of exploring its rich history.

This book is dedicated to my family: my father who instilled in me a love for history through his own coin collection and stories of a bygone era, and to my mother for instilling in me a sense of wonder and adventure. This book would not have been possible had it not been for my beautiful wife, Dawn's unconditional support, whose love, encouragement and, most of all, patience have made it possible for me to devote many years of dedicated study to produce this work. And most of all, to my two beautiful daughters, Shailee and Shivani, who together are the inspiration for the Shivlee Collection.

Sanjeev Kumar

Preface

While coins have existed for over 2,000 years in India, coinage of the Gupta dynasty stands apart in design and complexity as truly masterful works of art. The coins are struck in gold, silver, copper, and lead. Beginning with the first of the Gupta monarchs, Chandragupta I, the powerful Gupta kings succeeded in creating a coinage that was unrivaled by anything in Hindu India either before or after them. The coins of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty originating in the northwestern regions of the greater Indian subcontinent (present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan) in the first century AD, served as the inspiration for the beautiful coin designs struck in the fourth century AD by the Gupta kings who proceeded to issue and replace the local currency with their new currency as the Gupta Empire grew. These new and innovative coin designs served both as an economic currency as well as a medium of propaganda for the Gupta kings to proclaim themselves as the most devout, valorous, just, and all-powerful kings of the land.

This was a period in ancient India when powerful and long-lasting religious changes were taking place in the revival of the Vedic beliefs and rituals, the conflict between the brāhmaṇic belief systems and Buddhist and Jain forms of worship. The period from the fourth to the sixth century AD was a time when Hindu iconography was also evolving and firm rules governing the imagery of the Hindu gods and goddesses were being established. This evolution of design, primarily influencing Gupta art, is captured in the designs of the Gupta gold coins and provides us with a window into the vast tidal wave of change sweeping through ancient India. This book is designed to serve as a guide for collectors, scholars, and historians alike to fully appreciate the vast and beautiful coinage of the Gupta Empire as well as to fully understand its important contribution to India's history.

In 1914 John Allan published the *Catalogue of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauda.* The book served as the primary guide for researchers and scholars, and for the first time laid out the coinage of the Gupta Dynasty based primarily on the collection in the British Museum with supplementary coins from other museum collections.

Prior to the first edition of this book, the most recent comprehensive work on Gupta coins was *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire* by A. S. Altekar in 1957. Altekar's book came to fruition primarily as a result of his study of the Bāyāna Hoard discovered in 1946 and comprised of over 2,000 gold coins of the Gupta dynasty. Altekar was invited by the *Mahārāja* of Bharatpur to study and curate the 1,821 gold coins that had been recovered. His study of the hoard and his subsequent books have served as the main reference works for the study of the Gupta coinage for the last sixty years.

The Coinage of the Gupta Empire had quickly became the go-to reference for Gupta coins. While it was the most complete work to date, covering the vast number of coin types and varieties, it became outdated in the following decades as more hoards and new coins came to light. With new discoveries and new coins, copper plates, and inscriptions, the need for a more complete and updated reference book on Gupta coins became obvious. It had taken Altekar over ten years to complete his book, and over time his classification had developed and morphed. There were quite a few inconsistencies in the book, as well as outdated information from both Altekar's and Allan's works, which are still quoted in modern scholarship. Now, almost sixty years later, newly discovered Gupta coin types and varieties called for an updated, corrected study for such an important era of ancient India.

In 1981, P. L. Gupta and S. Srivastava published their catalogue, *Gupta Gold Coins in the Bharat Kala Bhavan,* where they applied Altekar's classification to group Gupta gold coins. In

1986, B. C. Chhabra catalogued coins in the National Museum, Delhi, again using Altekar's classification. Similarly in 1990, B. N. Mukherjee catalogued the coins in the Indian Museum, Kolkātā. In 1994, Ellen Raven published her thesis, *Gupta Gold Coins with a Garuḍa Banner,* a study of only a small subset of Gupta coins that included the *Garuḍa* standard. While each of these books, covering subsets of the coinage, were excellent works and added to our knowledge of coinage of the Gupta Empire, no one had attempted to publish a comprehensive and complete catalogue of the entirety Gupta coinage, which is no doubt a massive undertaking, requiring time, resources and above all access to major museums, private collections, and good libraries. The fact that no one had attempted this in the last 60 years should be quite telling.

The political history of the Gupta dynasty has been pieced together over the past century but is still incomplete. Some of the key works discussing the political history have been published by scholars such as B. C. Chhabra, S. R. Goyal, and K. K. Thaplyal, and their books are a must-read for the student of Gupta dynasty as they provide multiple views of the many controversies encountered in Gupta history. In recent years, Hans Bakker has also taken on the charge of delving into the political drama surrounding the Vākāṭakas and their interactions and underlying political currents with the Guptas. His papers on the subject help to better explain the transition of power from Kumāragupta I to Skandagupta and the later Guptas.

This book is a summary of over three decades of dedicated study of Gupta numismatics and the evidence and clues it provides to better piece together the history of their empire. It is laid out for the reader in an efficient format to attempt to simplify the complex maze of the different types and varieties evident in this complex coinage. Initially, the book was an attempt to create a catalog for my own personal use to serve as a guide for my study of just the Gupta gold coins. Over time, it was apparent that such a formidable project could not exist in a vacuum of just the gold coinage because the silver and base-metal coins formed an integral part in understanding the chronology of the Gupta kings. An in-depth study of the coinage seemed to be an absolute must: this had to include the study of designs, legends, and devices seen or missing from the coins, the weights, gold content/metal purity across the entire dynasty, a study of the coin distribution and total mintage, study and in some cases a reassessment of the hoards, the reanalysis of the attributions done to date, as well as to publish, in many cases for the first time, new data on related seals, copper plate charters, as well a fresh analysis of some of the key inscriptions. All of this needed to be done while keeping an eye on the historical events occurring *at that time and place* with a full understanding of their immediate history, their neighbors, their religious leanings, and the political currents of that time—all essential to fully understanding why a specific coin was struck, why it included a specific design or legend, a specific device or symbol and more importantly, what was the message it was conveying either overtly or covertly. Only then can one fully grasp the true nature of events transpiring during this time.

For the first time, this book catalogues the entire gold, silver, copper, and lead coinage of the Gupta dynasty. It includes many new coin types and new coin varieties which are published here for the first time, using my own personal database, as well as a database jointly developed by Ellen Raven and myself, called the Dīnāra Database. The book, for the first time, collects and illustrates coins from the key collections of Gupta coins from around the world, including many of the famous collections such as the J. P. Morgan Collection, Skanda Collection, the collections of William Spengler, Jan Lingen, and Alexander Fishman's collection of the dated Gupta silver coins, etc. The majority of these collections have never been published before.

In addition, this book takes into account the coins from a large number of private collections from around the world: the Vikram Chand Collection, the Maheshwari Collection

at IIRNS, the Tandon Collection, the Jalan Collection, and many other anonymous private collections—all of which are virtually inaccessible to mainstream scholars and researchers. I was fortunate to be granted full access. The coins illustrated in the pages ahead present data available to me at the time of publication.

The book also illustrates coins from the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University, Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum at the Banaras Hindu University in Vārāṇasī, Bibliothèque nationale de France, British Museum, Hunterian Museum, Indian Museum Kolkātā, Lahore Museum, Lucknow Museum, National Museum Delhi, and Patna Museum, among many others. My thanks to all of the museum curators, directors and collectors for providing me access to study these collections and to be able to for the first time create this comprehensive catalogue. This book also includes key Gupta Dynasty seals and seal impressions, which are being published here for the first time and will be helpful in filling in some of the gaps within the Gupta history.

This book also includes data from a first of its kind study on ancient Indian coinage, a spectrographic XRF metal analysis study of the largest group of Gupta dynasty coins so far. This study includes 225 gold coins covering most of the Gupta kings and most major types and varieties. This data have been compared against the specific gravity data published by Robert Bracey of British Museum of the Kuṣāṇa gold coins, which were in circulation in North India prior to the Gupta gold. The study also includes the analysis of the largest group of Gupta silver coins (with dates) completed so far, for a chronological assessment of metal purity and the study of a possible debasement of the Gupta coinage from the western part of the empire using these coins. In addition, a full XRF analysis of the silver coins issued by the Western Kṣatrapas prior to the Gupta dynasty was conducted. Alex Fishman was kind enough to forward me a complete group of the Kṣatrapa silver coins from his own collection, which covered silver coins from each of Kṣatrapa kings. This analysis helped provide a baseline to compare the Gupta silver coinage, which eventually replaces the Kṣatrapas coins after Chandragupta II begins the siege around AD 398. The results and analysis are published here in the Metal Analysis section (Chapter 6).

The book provides a comprehensive summary of all known titles, epithets, and birudas used by the Gupta kings in inscriptions, copper plate charters, coins, etc., along with a detailed list of all known dates for the silver and lead coins as well as a complete summary of the known coin hoards, find spots, and hot zones where these coins are still found in large numbers today. New detailed maps have been created for this edition documenting the ancient cities and ports, find spots of coins, inscriptions, and copper plates, as well as the extent of the Gupta Empire. The book also provides an analysis of the evolution of coin designs with a detailed explanation of the changing iconography. It discusses the symbolism and the legends, as well as the context. The origins of the first coins struck by Chandragupta I, to the established coin designs used by the kings that followed, to coins issued by the last of the Gupta kings is discussed at length. The book provides a comprehensive, up-to-date classification and rarity system for attributing the coins to the different Gupta kings on the basis of metal and design analysis. Based on this study, fifteen different Gupta Dynasty kings after Skandagupta are identified and summarized, many of these only known solely from their gold coins.

Using design and metal analysis and associated data, I correct many of the older theories proposed by scholars in the past, most of which have so far been accepted as facts. Up to now, it was very difficult for researchers to have a single reference covering the entire coinage of the Gupta dynasty. Now, readers can refer to each of the coins and analyze the data for working through their own research. My intent was to try to capture in one volume all of the known numismatic data.

In order to ensure a complete and thorough analysis, an exhaustive review of all publications on Gupta coinage and related aspects of their history, was conducted for this study. While it is not possible to cover every single topic discussed by hundreds of scholars over the past 150+ years, it should suffice to say that the bibliography presented here should serve as a very helpful tool for other researchers. My thanks to all of the scholars who have come before me in trying to address the inconsistencies visible in our understanding of this dynasty's history with their proposed theories, arguments, and discussions. Regardless of whether they were right or wrong, their thoughts and theories served as the building blocks for this work and the new data it provides.

One of the main issues facing earlier scholars was the lack of good photographs. In the initial planning discussions for this book, it had been suggested to me that I should only print the book using black-and-white images, as the color photographs would show all different shades of gold. While this is true, I felt that in this day and age, a black-and-white catalogue of such an important series would have been a mistake. The images used here have been taken using almost all forms of color photography, whatever was available at the time when the coin was available to be viewed: Polaroid images, 35mm photographs, early digital cameras that recorded images on floppy disks, mobile phones, etc., to images published over the past century in obscure journals, all of which helped create data that are included in this book.

I provide below a summary of the history of the Gupta dynasty to give the reader some background. In this book, I attempt to help solve some of the discrepancies, fill in many of the gaps, answer some of the open questions, address a few of the controversies, as well as attempt to set the record straight on Gupta history, events, and dates from a numismatic perspective. Much work still needs to be done, and this volume should help provide future researchers with a detailed and foundational dataset towards this goal.

Acknowledgements

The remarkable journey into the world of numismatics and ancient history was illuminated by pioneers such as Cunningham, Vincent Smith, John Allan, Altekar, Chhabra, P. L. Gupta, and Ellen Raven. Their groundbreaking work provided invaluable insights into the rich tapestry of history woven into these ancient metallic artifacts. My path in this field was kindled by a childhood fascination with my father's coin collection and further nurtured by the encouragement of my wife, leading me to an immersive exploration of the Gupta dynasty.

Throughout this endeavor, I have collaborated with Ellen Raven, a distinguished Indologist at the University of Leiden. Her 1994 publication, "Gupta Gold Coins with a *Garuḍa* Banner," a meticulous study rooted in her thesis, offered a crucial perspective on a specific segment of Gupta coinage. Over two decades, Ellen and I have jointly navigated the complex and intriguing realm of Gupta numismatics, striving to unravel the mysteries embedded in the coin designs, varieties, and novel types. Ellen's expertise lies primarily in the technical aspects—mints, minting techniques, and pattern analysis. In contrast, my focus has been on exploring the diverse array of coin designs, delving into their interconnectedness, conducting metal analyses, challenging established historical narratives with numismatic evidence, and developing a new classification system, all while assembling the world's most comprehensive Gupta Dynasty coin collection.

Our journey, marked by robust debates and discussions, was fueled by a shared passion for these exquisite coins. Whether through late-night conversations, during vacations, or amidst long flights, our collaborative and individual research efforts were relentless. Despite occasional differences in our interpretations and classifications, our commitment to uncovering the hidden stories within the Gupta gold coins remained strong. This enduring partnership with my esteemed colleague and friend, Ellen, has been a cornerstone of my numismatic journey, continually inspiring and driving our quest to decode the enigmatic legacy of the Gupta coins.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Robert Bracey of the British Museum for granting me comprehensive access to the museum's extensive image collection and the Vikram Chand Collection. His support has been invaluable, especially in responding to my requests to verify data, weights, and dates and locating coins and seals documented by Rapson in the 19th century. His diligence in uncovering the dated Budhagupta silver coins from the British Museum's collection, which were mistakenly stored with the Maukhārī dynasty coins, has been particularly noteworthy. These coins are now rightfully included in this publication. Additionally, I am grateful for Michael Willis's assistance in locating the terracotta sealing of Śrīgupta in the British Museum. My thanks to the Trustees of the British Museum for making the images available for this research and publication.

Special thanks are also due to Joe Cribb, a distinguished numismatist and former Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. His foreword to this book's first edition and continued guidance over the years have been crucial in shaping the methodology and execution of this extensive project.

Lastly, I appreciate the ongoing support and assistance provided by Shailendra Bhandare, the Assistant Keeper of South Asian Numismatics at the Ashmolean Museum, for graciously being available for discussions, particularly with deciphering the ancient Brāhmī scripts. Thanks also to Naushaba Anjum, Keeper of Coins at the Lahore Museum. A. K. Singh of the Bharat Kala Bhavan provided access to their collection for the first time in decades. J. P. N. Singh granted access to the collection at the Patna Museum. K. K. Maheshwari and Amisteshwar Jha assisted me at IIRNS. My sincere thanks to Dilip Rajgor for all his help and input as well as help in editing the manuscript of the first edition.

I would also like to thank Alex Fishman, whose knowledge of the Western Kṣatrapas is unparalleled and who has always been ready to help me decipher a legend or read a date. I am grateful for his immediate response to sending me a full group of his silver Kṣatrapa coins by courier within a day of my call for the XRF analysis; data from this group are included in the metal analysis section.

My many thanks also go to my friend J. P. Goenka, who was highly instrumental in arranging for my access to many collections that had not seen the light of day in decades, and his efforts yielded many of the key images published here for the first time. My thanks to both B. M. Jalan and Aditya Jalan in Patna for their help with arranging my access not only to their collection but also for their immense help with access to other museum collections by being tireless advocates on my behalf.

My thanks also go to a few key individuals who have been highly instrumental in tracking down and bringing to my attention coins I had originally missed. In particular, I wish to thank Akshay Jain, who was a young man many years back with a deep interest in Gupta coins and a keen eye for detail, who has become an able student of the Gupta coinage and has been very helpful in discussing and bringing many new coin varieties to my attention.

My thanks also go to Prakash Jinjuvadiā, who was kind enough to share his knowledge, images, and data on the base-metal coinage of the Guptas and Kṣatrapas, in particular the lead and silver coins, many of which were unpublished and could only have been highlighted in this book if it were not for him locating these rare and one of a kind coins. I also wish to thank Ranvijay Singh, whose memory and details on the Gupta coin find spots, hoards, and willingness to share data and images is truly amazing.

I also thank Professor Dr. Ashvini Agarwal, the head of the Department of History at Punjāb University. The seminar he organized in Chandigarh (*Coinage of the Imperial Guptas and their Contemporaries*, Nov. 2010) and the opportunity to discuss my research with scholars such as Hans Bakker were enlightening. I thank Bakker and Harry Falk for being at the forefront of research during this period and for reevaluating the prior scholarship on the inscriptions of the Gupta period based on new data.

I thank Dr. Prashant Kulkarni for his support over the years. He was instrumental in corralling the numismatic community in India and inviting scholars worldwide to collaborate on the Gupta dynasty coinage. An important seminar organized by Dr. Kulkarni in Nagpur (*International Seminar on Gupta Archaeology, Numismatics, Epigraphy, and Literature*, June 2016) was very invigorating. Dr. Kulkarni has been at the forefront of Indian numismatics for the past three decades and is highly instrumental in shepherding the numismatic community in India to reach new heights and bringing many new coins to my attention. I am grateful for the time spent discussing the minute details with me to ensure this second edition is as complete as possible. His contribution to editing the diacritical marks is deeply appreciated.

My thanks to Pankaj Tandon for help with providing me with a few of the coin images from the Lucknow Museum. Thank you to Noman Nasir for sharing his immense knowledge, photographs, and data of the post-Gupta coins from the Bengal region. The last section on the coins circulating in Bengal could not have been completed without his generous help.

My deep thanks go to B. R. Mani, Director General of the National Museum, Delhi, for writing a foreword for the first edition of this book, which is reproduced here. He was most gracious and accessible for discussions as well as with tracking down data on a few inscriptions. Dr. Mani's long and distinguished career as the former Additional Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India has given him a unique perspective and a keen sense of the impact of numismatics on the interpretation of history, and I am thankful to him for his help.

I sincerely thank Professor Deen Bandhu Pandey,Banaras Hindu University, for his invaluable insights and extensive knowledge, which were crucial in deciphering many of the elusive symbols and designs found on these coins. Our extensive discussions were both enlightening and enjoyable, and I deeply appreciate his assistance with my numerous inquiries.

I am also deeply indebted to Professor Dr. K. K. Thaplyal, a preeminent historian and former head of the History Department at Lucknow University. His willingness to engage in critical discussions throughout the writing of this book has been immensely helpful. Thaplyal's book, *The Imperial Guptas*, stands as the most up-to-date and comprehensive work on the subject and is an indispensable resource for anyone seeking to understand the complex political dynamics of northern India from the third to the sixth centuries.

Special thanks are also extended to Ashok Singh Thakur, a member of the Governing Council of INTACH. His generosity in sharing his collection and facilitating numerous connections has been invaluable to my research and this project's success.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Suken Shah, my diligent research assistant, during the formative years of writing the first edition of this book. At the time, Suken was a postgraduate student at Deccan College, Puṇe, India. His exceptional research skills were pivotal in unearthing rare, often overlooked scholarly papers and books, some only available in a handful of libraries worldwide. His efforts significantly enriched our exploration of Gupta history, inscriptions, and scholarly interpretations spanning over two centuries. I thank Subhasree Banik for her help with the concordance for this second edition and for helping me track down many of the details for the inscriptions.

Special thanks are also extended to Parag Tripathi, Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India and the Former Additional Solicitor General of India, for sharing his insights and collection for this book.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to Steve Album and Joe Lang, Michael Gasvoda, Farokh and Malcolm Todywalla, Goga Jain, Rajender Maru, Girish Veera, Shatrughan Saravagi, Muhammad Sultan, Girish Sharma, Badri Prasad Verma, Wilfried Pieper, Devendra Handa, Bhushan Kapadia, Karan Dodlwar, Manoj Shastri, Nishant Pareek, Yogeshwar Puri, Raju Bhatt, Prateek Upadhyay, Ankit Kanodia, Parveen Jain, Subham Gupta, Sushmita Basu Majumdar, Manmohan Kumar, and the broader numismatic collector community.

The challenging endeavor of discovering and contextualizing an obscure coin and the thrill of integrating it into the broader mosaic of Indian history would not be feasible without the collaborative spirit of this new era. Countless collectors generously shared their photos and data, often without seeking any recognition. Their collective contributions have been instrumental in realizing the ambitious scope of this comprehensive work.

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Andrew Reinhard for his invaluable contributions in editing and formatting this extensive book. His meticulous attention to detail, unwavering support, and months of dedicated effort have been instrumental in its completion.

Numismatic Terms

Alloy: An alloy is a homogeneous composition of metals used to create a specific coin. The primary metals used for coins issued by the Gupta kings were gold (Au), silver (Ag), copper (Cu), and lead (Pb). Gupta gold coins are mostly alloyed with silver and copper. Gupta silver coins are alloyed with mostly copper and less than 1% gold. Gupta copper coins are mostly pure copper (>99% Cu). Lead coins are either of mostly pure lead or alloyed with tin (Sn). See metrology section for details (Chapter 6).

Biruda: The "*biruda*" refers to the imperial title used by each Gupta king. For example, the biruda *Vikramādityaḥ* is assumed primarily to be an Imperial title used by Chandragupta II, yet was also a title used throughout the Gupta era by different Gupta kings. It was a common practice for rulers in ancient India to reuse ancestral birudas or those of prior famous kings.

Bust: Bust refers to the head and neck of the king as shown on coins, shown either in profile or from the front.

Class: A coin's Class is a general grouping based on similarities in size, weight, metal, and iconography. For example, the *Aśvamedha* Type coins are easily grouped by the direction the horse faces on the obverse. Within each class we see different varieties.

Copper Plate: A copper plate or *Tāmrapaṭṭa* is a metal plate on which land grants by a king or royal authority were recorded as proof of the transaction or gift.

Dīnāra: The Kuṣāṇas and the Guptas referred to their gold coins "dīnāras" in their inscriptions. This name for their gold coins was derived from the Roman term for their coins—denarius.

Double-Struck: A double-struck coin is one showing a double impression due to the dies shifting during the striking process. Gupta coins were made by striking the flan, which was put in between an obverse die and a reverse die and struck with a hammer, thus creating an impression on both sides of a flan.

Dates: Dates on Gupta coins are seen only on silver and lead coins and are very rare. No dates are found on gold coins. On silver coins, the date is found on the obverse; on lead coins the dates are seen on both the obverse and reverse. On the obverse of lead coins, sometimes the legend and numerals are hidden within the scroll designs.

Flan: The blank metal disc that is stamped with a coin's design using an obverse and reverse die.

Gresham's Law: A monetary principle which shows that when two forms of a monetary unit are considered to have the same face value (i.e., two different dīnāra issued by two different kings), the monetary unit with the higher value (i.e., the dīnāra which has a higher gold purity) will eventually disappear from circulation i.e., the coins with the higher gold or silver purity will be melted down to produce more coins of lower metal purity.

Legend: The legend refers to the inscription seen on either side of a coin. Gupta coinage uses only Brāhmī letters and numerals, which can be the western, eastern, or southern form of Brāhmī. Examples of Gupta coins have been found with legends written either in one, two, or all three forms of Brāhmī letters on both the obverse and reverse. Legends are usually written in a metrical form of Sanskrit language using the Brāhmī script.

Mint Mark/Control Mark: Coins in ancient India sometimes bear a mint mark or a banker's mark. Early Gupta coins can contain control marks which seem to be a design copied from earlier Kuṣāṇa coins.

Mule: A mule is usually a coin which has been created in error by using either two obverse or two reverse dies or a coin created by using an obverse die with the wrong reverse die. For example, a Gupta coin showing the name of a king on the obverse with a reverse which shows a biruda of a different king would be a mule coin. This example is present on rare Gupta coins (p. 247).

Obverse: On ancient Greek and Roman coins, the obverse refers to the side which shows the head or bust. On Gupta coins, it is the side which shows the king, the imperial symbol such as the *Garuḍa*, or a royal event such as an *Aśvamedha* sacrifice (see p. 261). On silver coins issued by the Guptas, the obverse always shows a bust of the king. On copper coins, the obverse either has a portrait or bust of the king, a royal event, or an imperial or religious symbol, followed by the king's title, name, his biruda, or both, with or without a date and other religious iconography or devices (e.g., the three arched hills copied from the Kṣatrapas) on the reverse. In this book, the obverse side is always shown first, to the left of the reverse side.

***Repoussé*:** *Repoussé* coins are struck with only one die with the other side left blank. In Gupta numismatics, the only *repoussé* coins known are the *Garuḍa* Type coins struck for Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta in the Dakṣiṇa Kosala region.

Reverse: On Gupta coins, the reverse is opposite the side which shows the king, the king's name, or a unique royal event. On gold coins, the reverse usually shows a deity, the exception being the King and Queen on Couch Type of Chandragupta I which shows both the King and Queen.

Right or Left: When used in reference to the coin, "right" or "left" refers to the side of the coin from the point of view of the viewer, unless the coin's proper right or proper left is specifically mentioned.

Seal/Sealing: A seal is an engraved piece that serves as a stamp to produce an impression on a soft surface such as wax or clay. The impression made by the seal is called a sealing.

Specific Gravity: In the past, the composition of the metal within a coin was determined by calculating its specific gravity based on Archimedes Principle. While this method was good for coins with a high percentage of a primary metal, it was not very accurate for coins with alloys. Readings can vary depending on the process, liquid, as well as temperature. Andrew Oddy of the British Museum in 1971 showed that even a 5% copper alloy in a gold coin can skew the gold reading by almost 3%. For all specific gravity readings here, the Oddy tables for

Gold/Silver Alloy have been used to calculate the approximate gold percent. Gupta gold coins had both silver and copper as evidenced through the use of the X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) spectrographic study published herein (see Chapter 6).

Symbols and *Tamghā*: On Gupta coins, the symbol (*tamghā*) is a geometric design seen on the reverse, usually in the upper-left quarter of the coin. However, symbols such as the altar, *chakra*, crescent, sun, *Śrīvatsa*, etc. are also seen on obverse (Symbols, see p. 139; *tamghā*, see Appendix I, pp. 516–17).

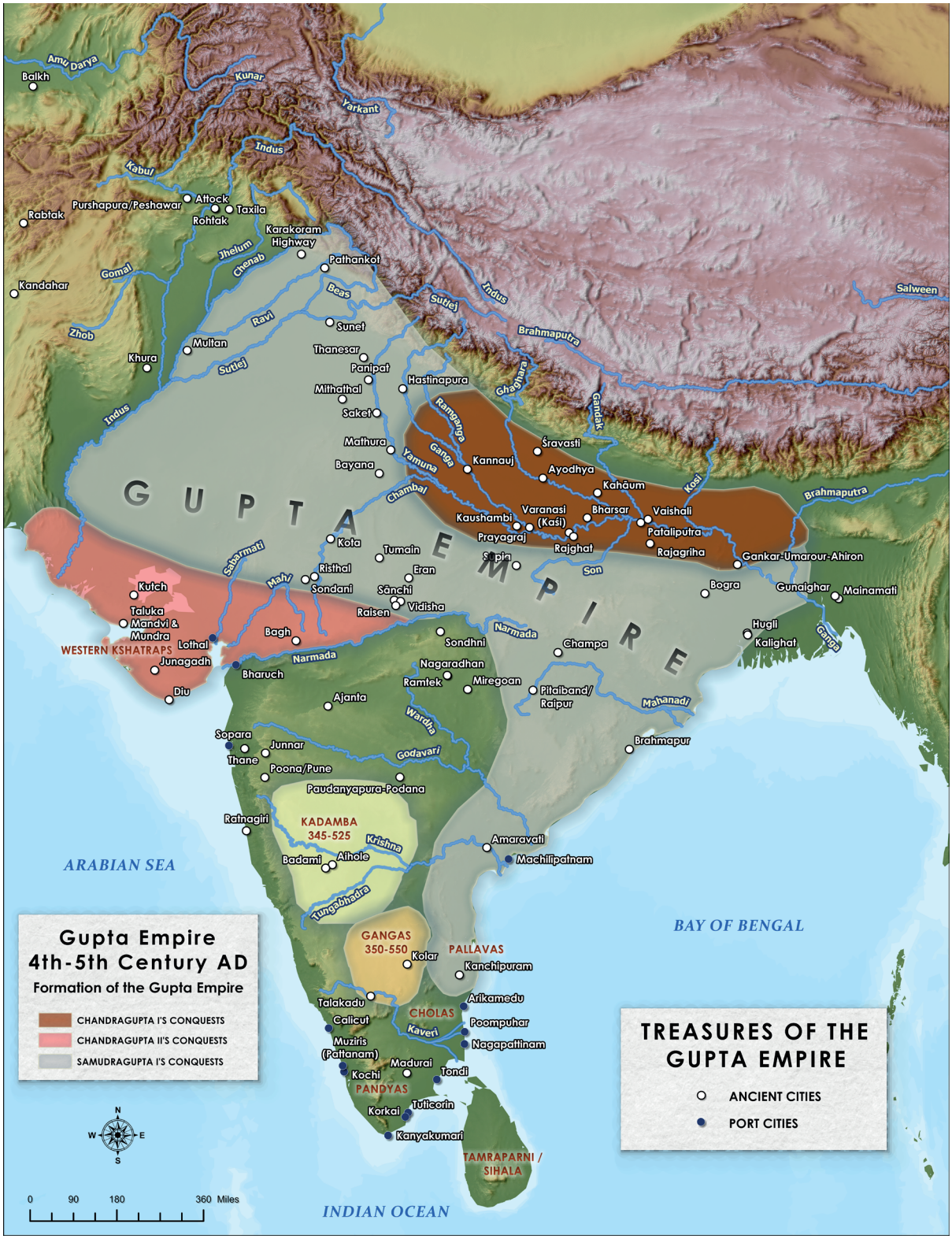
Type: In this book, "type" differentiates coins with different designs/scenes depicted on the obverse. On Gupta gold coins for example, either the king or a major royal event is usually shown on the front side of the coin, such as the Archer Type, *Aśvamedha* Type, Horseman Type, Tiger-Slayer Type, etc.

Variety: Variety refers to the variations seen within the designs on the obverse or reverse of coins of the same class. For example, the presence of an additional symbol, the difference in legends or birudas, the variations in design of the goddess, the posture of the goddess, what she holds in her hands, the position of the hands or her feet, presence of crescents, crowns, halos, obverse symbols, etc. all constitute different varieties of one specific Class of coin.

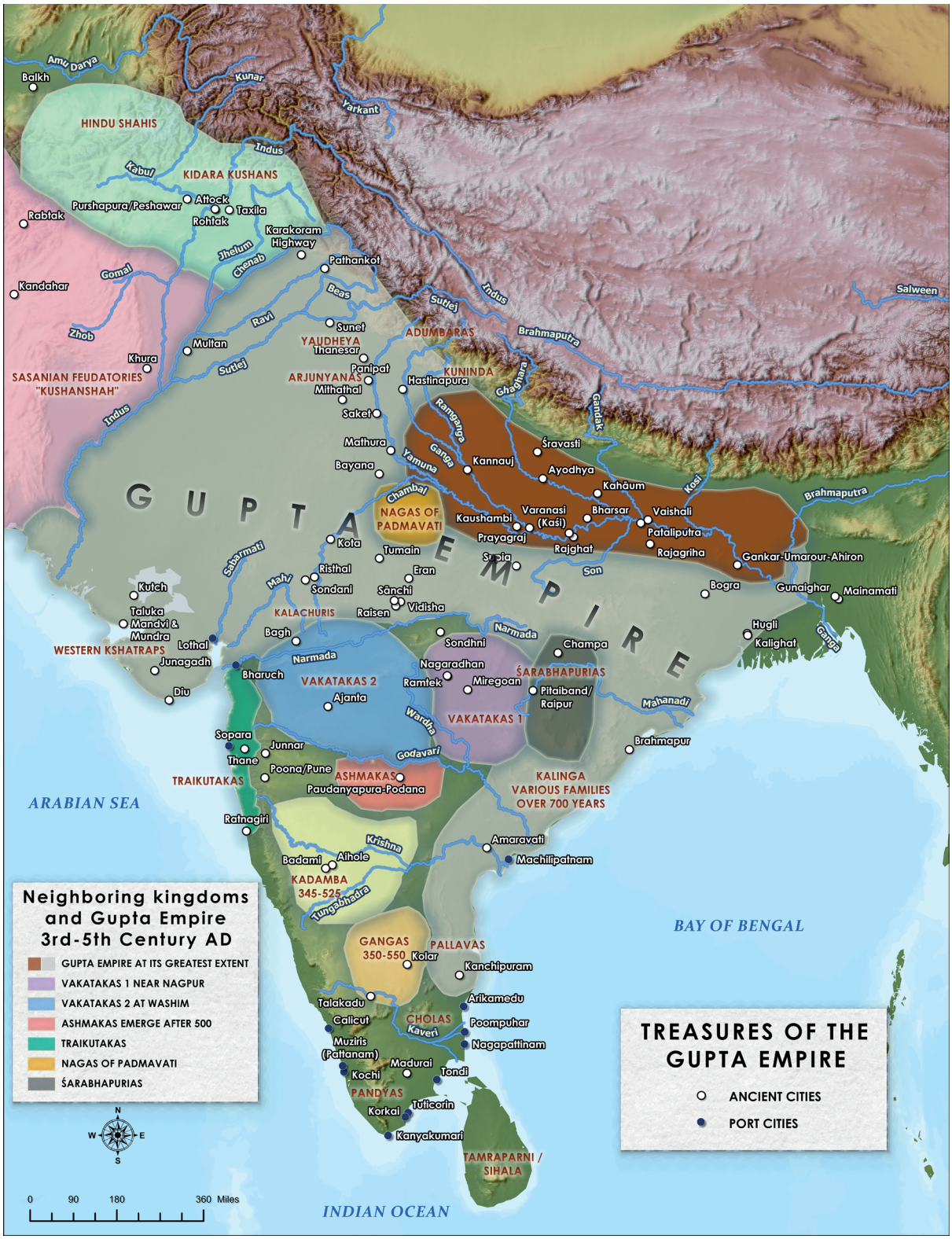
Weight: While it was once assumed that coins are struck to specific weights in ancient India, the reality is that this was not the case. While there may have been a weight "standard" or a target weight, it seems that under the Guptas the mints produced coins with a wide range of weights. The percentage of gold within the coin was kept constant in order to maintain the intrinsic value of a dīnāra. The weights are also very important when trying to determine if a coin is either genuine or a copy or fake. In the past, weights of coins were discussed in terms of grains, but now the weights are best discussed in grams: l grain = 0.06479 grams. The unit for grams is g.

A good resource for understanding coin production is the analysis presented in the book *Coinage in Ancient India* (Prakash and Singh 1968), which discusses in detail the metal compositions, production techniques, and conversion rates of coins and currency as found within Greece, Rome, Central Asia, and ancient India.

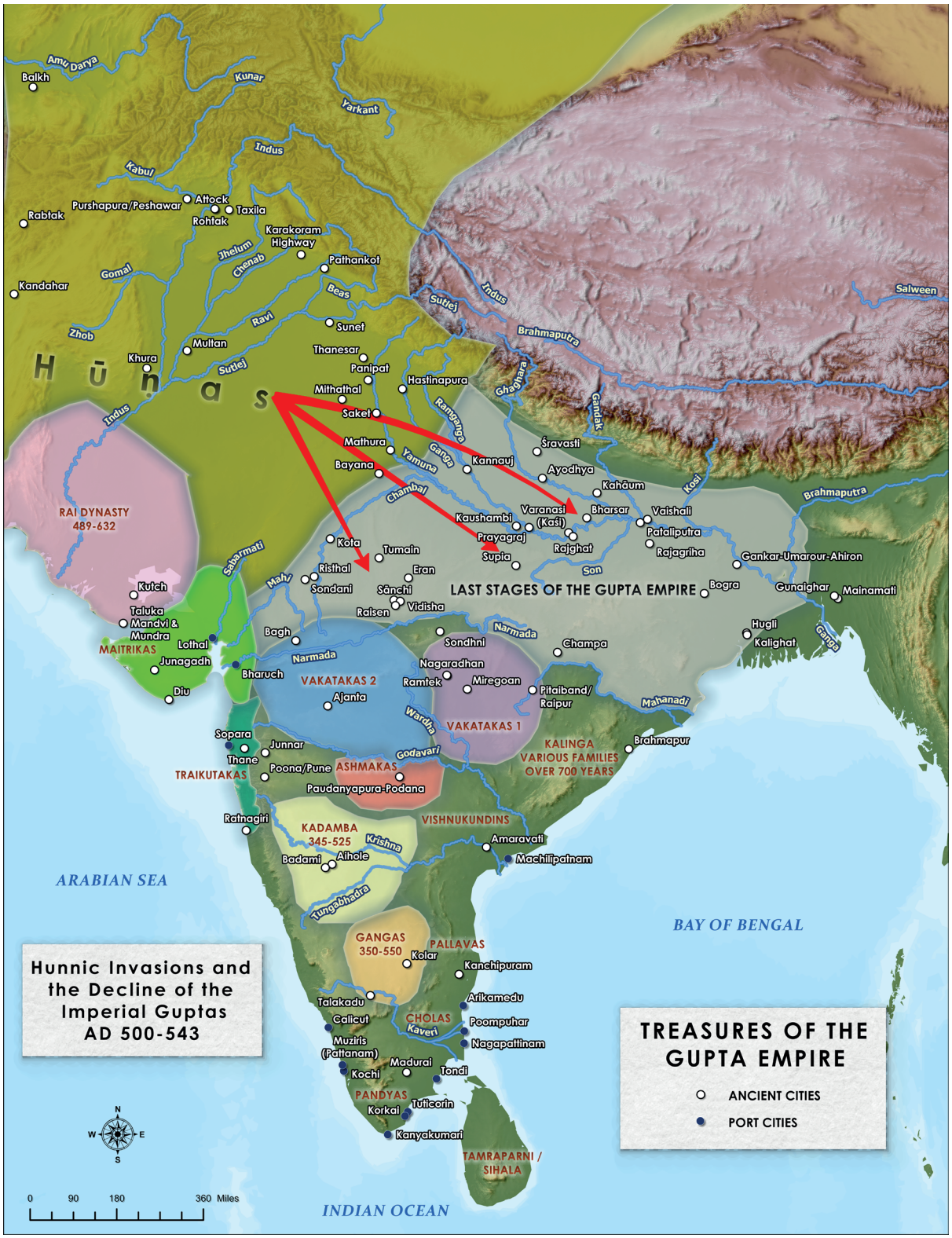
Maps of the Gupta Empire



Map 1. Neighboring kingdoms and the Gupta Empire (4th–5th century AD).



Map 2. Neighboring kingdoms and the Gupta Empire (3rd–5th century AD)



Map 3. Hunnic invasions and the decline of the imperial Guptas (AD 500–543).

Mural from Ajanta Caves.

PART ONE

A NUMISMATIC HISTORY OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

Kings of the Imperial Gupta Dynasty

		Coins			
King	**Dates**	**Au**	**Ag**	**Cu**	**Pb**
Śrīgupta	269–294		✓		
Ghatoṭkacha	Before 319				
Chandragupta I	319–343	✓		✓	
Samudragupta I	344–378	✓		✓	
Rāmagupta / Kāchagupta	Rāmagupta 378–381 / Kāchagupta 382	✓		✓	
Chandragupta II	383–412	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kumāragupta I	409–450/452	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ghatoṭkachagupta	453	✓	✓		
Purugupta	456		✓		
Skandagupta	449–468	✓	✓	✓	✓
Narasiṁhagupta I	470–474	✓			
Samudragupta II	Late 5th century	✓			
Kumāragupta II	470–476	✓	✓		
Chandragupta III	Late 5th century	✓			
Budhagupta	476–488	✓	✓		
Prakāśaditya	499–520	✓			
Parākramadityaḥ	Before 532	✓			
Vikramādityaḥ	Before 532	✓			
Chandragupta IV	Early 6th century	✓			
Vainyagupta	507–508	✓			
Bhānugupta	?–510	✓			
Narasiṁhagupta II	518–532	✓			
Kumāragupta III	?–543	✓			
Viṣṇugupta	540–543	✓			

Table 0.1. List of the kings of the Imperial Gupta dynasty with approximate regnal dates. All dates AD.

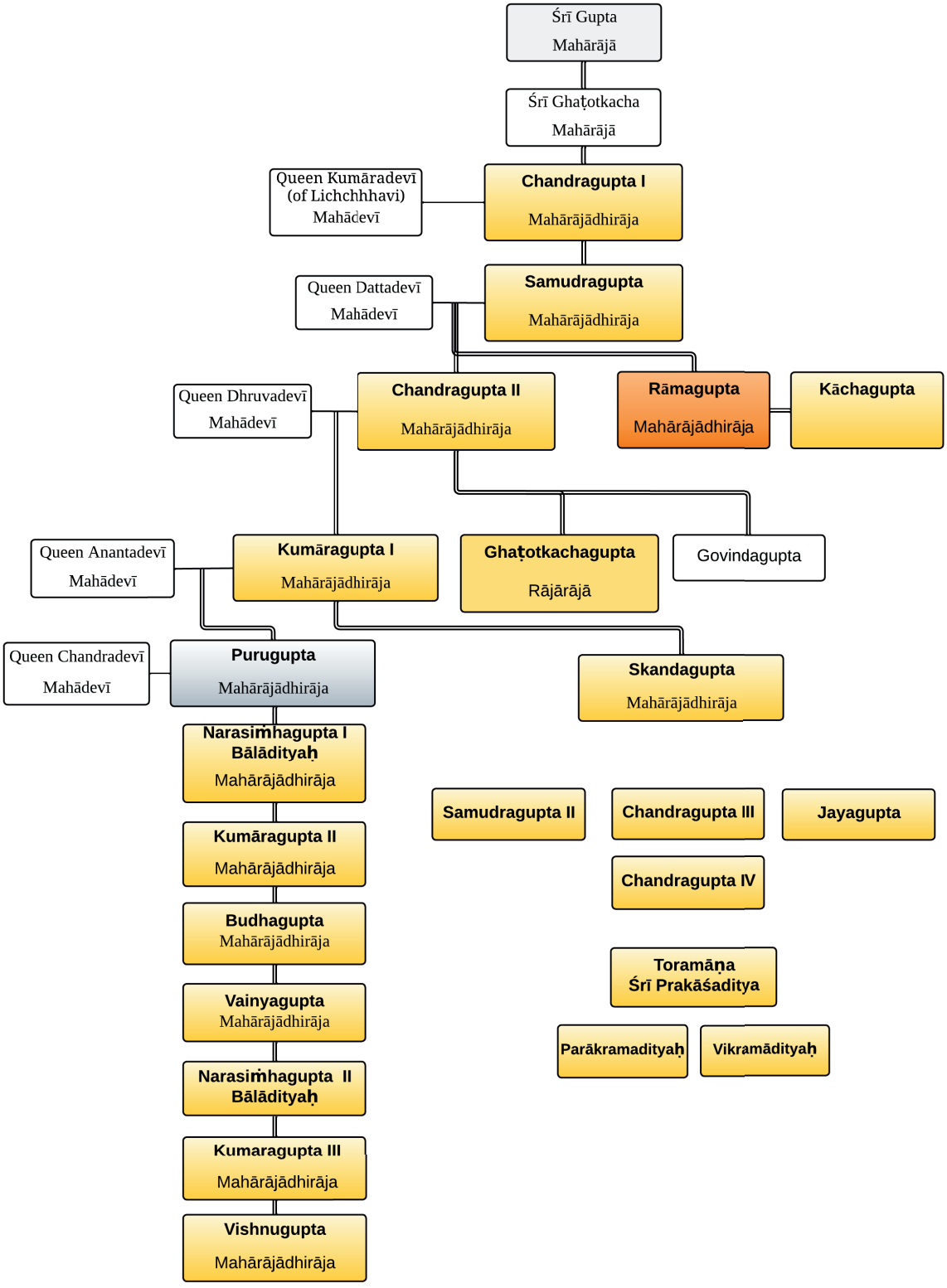


Figure 0.1. Genealogy of the Gupta dynasty with primary coin currency coded by color: yellow (gold), gray (silver), brown (copper).

THE HISTORY OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE was forged by battles. This beautiful coin of the *Chhatra* Type shows King Chandragupta II, *Vikramādityaḥ*, standing on the battlefield, wearing jewels and a sword. He is dropping oblations into the *Yajña kuṇḍa* to seek the blessings of the gods prior to embarking to conquer new lands. An attendant stands behind the king, holding a parasol over the king's head. This coin was issued around AD 400, about the time his army was engaged in the siege to capture the Gujarat region from the control of the western Kṣatrapas. PC, 1119.

I. The Gupta Dynasty

1.1 Introduction

The disintegration of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty, which for almost two centuries prior had held control over north India, created a power vacuum at the end of the third century AD. This void was eventually filled by a number of monarchical or republican states in northern and western India; however, it is not clear who actually was in control over the Māgadha region (eastern India) during the last quarter of the third century AD.[1] This region was ripe for a new, powerful unifying dynasty, a role that was eventually filled by the Gupta kings, who in the fourth century AD gained control of most of the regions of north, western, central, and eastern India. The initial home of the Gupta dynasty is assumed to be in the area of the Kāśī–Ayodhyā–Pāṭaliputra region. Based on coin finds, all indications are that the Gupta capital was around Kannauj and Kāśī, not Pāṭaliputra.[2] Sealings and coins attributed to Śrīgupta have been found mostly in the Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjāb region. The find spot analysis of Gupta coins suggests that the original home of the Guptas was Kāśī–Kannauj region, Uttar Pradesh.[3]

The coins issued by the Gupta kings from the fourth through the sixth centuries AD, help to fill the gaps within the narrative of the history of ancient India. The find spots of the coins, weights, purity of gold and silver, designs, and legends/inscriptions, as well as the number of coins minted during a king's reign can help provide insight into the state of the economy, religious beliefs, expansion of the empire, and influence from other cultures. The clues to piecing together the complex web of ancient Indian history are all around us in the form of sculptural art and inscriptions, temples, oral recitations, ancient literary works, and coins. While serving as an economic medium, coins are also time capsules providing valuable information on economic strength, conquests, and the records of the dynastic and royal achievements.

As seen throughout the history of ancient India, the tradition of recycling the names of previous great kings become a mainstay within the Gupta dynasty. In addition to their similar and familiar royal names, their coins also followed an established formula for the most part, leading to a coinage with easily identifiable markers. These familiar old names and familiar designs provided a sense of calm to a mostly illiterate populace, as well as a sense of stability. Associating their original names with their new assumed royal and ancestrally significant and popular names seems to be a continual source of frustration for scholars and historians trying to decipher who wrote which inscription, or which coin belongs to which king. King Chandra of the MathurāMehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription continues to create confusion: gold coins of Kācha were the source of many books and papers, and it was unclear as to whether the coins issued with the name *Chandra* were issued by Chandragupta

1. Thaplyal 2012: 42.
2. See Metrology, Chapter 6.
3. See Find Spots, section 4.1.

I or II, or were there other Gupta kings who also adopted the name Chandragupta (III and IV) and continued to issue gold coins during the later years as the Gupta Empire slowly started to disintegrate? Gold coins issued by later kings who reused the name Kumāragupta continue to puzzle scholars who could not decide whether to assign them to Kumāragupta II or a Kumāragupta III. Gupta history or numismatic books have so far uniformly addressed this in the most basic manner—group all of the coins with the name *Chandra* on them and assign them to the most convenient

	A. S. Altekar *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire and its Imitations* (1957)	**B. C. Chhabra** *Catalogue of Gupta Gold Coins of the Bayana Hoard in the National Museum* (1986)	**S. R. Goyal** *The Imperial Guptas* (2005)	**K. K. Thaplyal** *The Imperial Guptas* (2010)	**S. Kumar** *Treasures of the Gupta Empire*, 2nd ed. (2024)
Śrīgupta	260–280	270–290	295–300	269–294	AD 269–294
Ghaṭotkacha	280–300	290–305	300–319	299–319 and 294–319	Before 319
Chandragupta I	320–330	305–325	319–350	319–343	319–343
Samudragupta I	330–370	330–370	350	344–374	344–378
Rāmagupta–Kāchagupta	Not given	Rāmagupta 370–374 Kācha 325–330	Kācha 350–353	Rāmagupta 374–376	Rāmagupta 378–381 Kāchagupta 382
Chandragupta II	375–412	375–414	376–413	376–412	383–412
Kumāragupta I	416–450	414–455	415–449	415–455	407–450
Ghaṭotkachagupta	435	Not given	1st qtr. of fifth century	435	453
Purugupta	468–470*	Not given	Short period	467	456
Skandagupta	455–467	456–468	455–467	455–467	449–468
Narasiṁhagupta I	470–472	Not given	517	510	470–474
Samudragupta II					Late 5th c.
Kumāragupta II	472–475	Not given	467–476	473–476	470–476
Chandragupta III					Late 5th c.
Budhagupta	475–496	Not given	476–494	476–494	476–488
Prakāśaditya	496–500			510	499–520
Parākramadityaḥ					Before 532
Vikramādityaḥ					Before 532
Chandragupta IV					Early 6th c.
Vainyagupta	500–510	Not given	506–507	507	507/508
Bhānugupta	510–518	Not given	510 (p. 473)	510	?–510
Narasiṁhagupta II	518–532				518–532(?)
Kumāragupta IlI	532–540	Not given	532–550	Ended rule before 543	? –543
Viṣṇugupta	540–550	Not given	532–550	543	540–543

Table 1.1. Chronology and regnal dates of Gupta kings. All dates AD.

culprit—Chandragupta II. Why? Because he was of course the "most famous King Vikramāditya." Or was he?

From epigraphic evidence, we know that the Gupta dynasty was started by a Śrīgupta. In Gupta epigraphs detailing the genealogy (as seen on inscriptions and seals found so far), he is referred to as *Mahārāja,* Rajnña, and always with a title of *Srī*.[4] This title has led scholars to debate whether it was an honorific title or a part of his name. A silver coin and various sealings with his name have been found, and all of them are illustrated further in this volume (pp. 196–97). Ghaṭotkacha, who is referred to in inscriptions as a *Mahārāja*, followed Śrīgupta, but other than this we do not have more information about who he was or his exploits. So far, no coins or seals with his name have been found. All epigraphs mentioning Ghaṭotkacha leave out the name Gupta and only refer to him as *Mahārāja* Ghaṭotkacha (not to be confused with Ghaṭotkachagupta, a younger brother of Kumāragupta I). While discussing the importance of the use of an epithet or a title for a king, Altekar argued that the use of a title such as *Mahārāja* instead of *Mahārājadhirāja* on the Puṇe and Rithpur copper plates of Prabhāvatīgupta, may indicate carelessness on the part of the scribe and therefore, such inscriptional evidence should be disregarded.[5] This argument falls flat upon review of the biruda table (pp. 28–30), which shows us that *Rājā, Mahārāja*, and *Mahārājadhirāja* were interchangeable royal titles used throughout the Gupta era for many of the Gupta kings, a fact that seems to have escaped Altekar's attention when making this argument. For example, the Samudragupta Tiger-Slayer Type coins only use the title of *Rājā* and not *Mahārājadhirāja* for this great king of kings.

Ghaṭotkacha's son, Chandragupta I, appeared at the beginning of the fourth century AD, and scholars have assigned AD 319 as the date of his ascent to power. This date is considered as the start of the Gupta era (GE), which was used by the Gupta kings on their coins and inscriptions, a date confirmed by Jaina seventh-century texts.[6] His marriage to the Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī was of significant importance because the Lichchhavis were a political force in the east and seem to have provided the impetus and resources in terms of power and military might to Chandragupta I to start to gain sway over the surrounding territories. His coins of the King and Queen Type celebrate his marriage, and these coins continued to be issued later by his son, Samudragupta I.[7]

The King and Queen Type coins were also issued by Chandragupta II as well as Kumāragupta I.[8] Scholars continue to argue over which, if any, coin types were issued by Chandragupta I. Some have attributed the King and Queen Type coins to him, while others assign these coins to Samudragupta. The question of which coins should be attributed to Chandragupta I is discussed in great detail in later chapters. Suffice to say that my view is more in line with Bhaṇḍarkar and Chhabra, both of whom held that it was incorrect to assign none or just one type of the gold coins to this first Gupta king, a king, who by most accounts is assumed to have ruled for over twenty years.[9] To assume that a king who ruled for this long did not issue a single coin (a view held by John Allan and Ellen Raven), or just issued one type of coin (as proposed by Altekar, Mukherjee, and P. L. Gupta) is incorrect. Evidence from the study of the evolution of the designs and metal analysis of these coins will show other coin types which should be attributed to Chandragupta I because they were issued prior to the ascent of Samudragupta I to the throne.

4. Mani 2012–2013: 273.
5. Altekar 1957: 80.
6. Pathak 1977: 195.
7. There was also a second king who used the name Samudragupta (II), after Skandagupta (see p. 466).
8. Thaplyal 2012: 59 notes that the matrimonial alliance of the Guptas with the Lichchhavis led to the amalgamation of the Lichchhavi territories with the Gupta Kingdom.
9. Thaplyal 2012: 66.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta I mentions that his father, Chandragupta I, "with great joy and emotion, with tear-filled eyes and to the joy of his courtiers, looked upon with sad faces by others of equal birth, declared his son Samudragupta as his successor to the Gupta throne."[10] Thaplyal incorrectly suggests that one of these sad faces was of Kāchagupta (a prince of equal birth, according to him) and that he was another son of Chandragupta I, who usurped the throne and ruled for a short time.[11] The identity of this usurper Kāchagupta is discussed in great detail later in this volume, substantiated with numismatic evidence to prove that Kāchagupta was in fact the royal name assumed by Rāmagupta (pp. 280–85).

Samudragupta I is assumed to have come to the power sometime in the mid-fourth century AD. We do not have a firm date of his ascent to the Gupta throne, but it is clear from the numismatic and epigraphic evidence that he was one of the greatest emperors of ancient India. He came not only to be known as a conqueror who consolidated most of north and central India under his rule, but also regarded as a great statesman, poet, and a musician, all of which is detailed in his Allahabad Pillar Inscription. His empire included most of northern, western, central, and eastern India, including Eastern Malwa, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and parts of Bengal, and its rise as a formidable military power helped him consolidate the monarchical states located in the northern, northwest region up to Lahore and Karnal and perhaps even further north.[12] His empire came to include the tribal republican states located in western and northwestern India, either as a result of conquest by his forces or by their acceptance of his sovereignty through diplomatic pressure and alliances. A consolidated empire under his rule led to stability and peace, which in turn led to a flourishing trade, economy, and religion, all of which can be seen from the vast number of designs in gold coins minted under his rule. His *Aśvamedha* coins record not only the revival of the ancient Vedic religious practices but also chronicle his journey to become the *Mahārājadhirāja*—the Great King of Kings.

Rāmagupta, the eldest son of Samudragupta I, seems to be the Governor of Vidiśā sometime around AD 378–382 and appears to have taken on the name of Kāchagupta upon assuming the Gupta throne after Samudragupta's death. He governed Vidiśā, a most important center of trade and religion, centrally located in India, which was the traditional post for the heir apparent Gupta princes. Upon Samudragupta I's death, during the struggle for the succession to the Gupta throne, Rāmagupta must have proclaimed his right to the throne and proceeded to issue the gold coins bearing his assumed name, Kācha, from the Ujjain mint.

Thaplyal notes that his younger brother, Chandragupta [II], seems to have been an ambitious prince who without proper claim to succession captured the Gupta throne, and the elder brother Rāmagupta was left with no option but to declare himself as king in the Malwa region.[13] At this time he assumes the name Kācha. However, as a claimant to the throne, Kācha's coins do not yet show the *Garuḍadhvaja*—the *Garuḍa* standard—which was the imperial symbol of the Gupta Kings. At this stage, his gold coins only show him holding a *Chakradhvaja*, the wheel-topped chakra standard. It is only after he ascends to the Gupta throne around AD 382–383, that we see the gold coins struck by the royal mint incorporate the *Garuḍadhvaja* on the obverse, thus confirming that he was now in full control of the Gupta throne.

Unfortunately for him, his rule lasted for a very short time as is evidenced by only three gold coins found so far with this royal Gupta emblem, the *Garuḍadhvaja.* Very soon after assuming the

10. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 216.

11. Thaplyal 2012: 62.

12. The *Rājadaṇḍa* Type coins struck with the name of Samudragupta by a Kidarite king confirms his reach into the northern Punjāb.

13. Thaplyal 2012: 159.

throne, Kācha was assassinated by his younger brother Chandragupta II who assumed the throne in AD 383, and promptly married Rāmagupta's wife Dhruvadevī.[14] Whether the assassination was a result of Chandragupta II's desire for her and an affair with his elder brother's queen or his ambitions for the throne, or both, is a subject of many debates. This shameful act by Chandragupta II is also recorded in the Sañjan copper plates of Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Amoghavarṣa, line 48: "The despised donor of Kali Yuga of Gupta lineage, having killed his brother... seized his kingdom and also his wife."[15] The numismatic evidence of Rāmagupta and Kāchagupta confirms that these two key names in Gupta history were one and same king.

All official Gupta inscriptions and seals issued by the kings completely skip the names of both Rāmagupta and Kāchagupta. The assassination of an older brother to take the throne was quickly covered up by the propaganda machine of Chandragupta II's court. Rāmagupta was painted as a coward and Chandragupta II is made a hero in their revised version of history.[16] Even though the coins of Kācha look similar to the Gupta gold coins, historians did not consider him a Gupta king. Then in 1946, in the Bāyāna Hoard, a solitary gold coin of Kācha was discovered which also featured the *Garuḍadhvaja* as part of the design on the obverse of the coin, thereby confirming that he had indeed ruled as a Gupta monarch long enough to be able to issue these gold coins.

Chandragupta II's ascent to the Gupta throne in AD 383 leads to a further expansion of the Gupta Empire in the west. His campaign against the Kṣatrapa kings is legendary, captured in various literary works from that time. The empire flourished under his rule as seen from the vast amount of gold coins minted during his long reign of approximately thirty years. He introduced many new coin types in gold, silver, copper, and lead. With the capture of some of the Kṣatrapa mints, he also proceeds to issue coins in silver and lead which emulated the coin designs issued in this region under the prior Kṣatrapa rulers. As shown in section 6.1, the earliest dates seen on these Kṣatrapa type silver coins issued by Chandragupta II record a date of Śaka era 320 and on other coins Gupta era 79; both dates equal to AD 398, confirming that this was the year he first gained control of some of the Kṣatrapa territories and mints.[17] His earliest coins in lead feature a new, unique design showing the *Garuḍa* eagle on the obverse with the Kṣatrapa codified design of three arched hills and a date of Varṣā 81 (coins **554**–**557**, AD 400), as well as his biruda (imperial title) *Srī Vikramaḥ*. As Gupta rule solidified in the Kṣatrapa territories, the Gupta lead and silver coins emulating the Kṣatrapa coin designs flooded this region. The military campaign against the Śaka kings continued for seventeen years and the last of the Kṣatrapa kings was eliminated by Kumāragupta I in AD 415, once again evidenced by his coins issued with a Śaka era date of 337 (coin **743**), illustrated below. These coins record the final conquest of the last of the Kṣatrapa rulers in the west as well as the local mints. The last of the coins issued by Rudrasiṁha III, the last Kṣatrapa king, is dated SE 337 (AD 415), confirming that either in or after this year the Kṣatrapas were eliminated as a power in that region.[18]

Chandragupta II had at least three sons: Govindagupta, Kumāragupta I, and Ghaṭotkachagupta, and at least one daughter, Prabhāvatīgupta. It is generally believed that Chandragupta II's own marriage with the Nāga princess Kuberanāgā (his second queen), and later the marriage of his daughter Prabhāvatīgupta with Vākāṭaka prince Rudrasena II, were meant to garner the support of the Nāgas and the Śakas.[19] Rudrasena II died very soon after the marriage leaving Prabhāvatīgupta

14. The date for his accession to the throne is based on a reassessment of the Mathurā Pilaster Inscription of year 61, written in his fifth regnal year (see section 5.2, pp. 105–06).

15. *Epigraphia Indica*,18: 255.

16. See the Sanskrit plays *Devīcandraguptam* and *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* by Viśākhadatta.

17. Jha-Rajgor 1994: 285.

18. Jha-Rajgor, 1994: 245.

19. Thaplyal 2012: 171.

to rule the Vākāṭakas as the queen regent in the name of her young son Pravarasena with the help of her father, the great Gupta emperor Chandragupta II. During this time, prince Govindagupta is charged by his father with the task of governing Vidiśā filling the void created by the assassination of his uncle Rāmagupta. Vidiśā was a place of prime religious and economic importance, the center of major trade routes and a primary trading hub during that time.

The struggle of the succession for the Gupta throne restarted towards the end of the reign of Chandragupta II. Following the example set by his father, Kumāragupta I seems to have sidelined his elder brother Govindagupta,[20] the elder brother and rightful heir to the throne. Unlike Samudragupta's ascent to power, we do not have any epigraphic evidence to know for certain whether Kumāragupta's rise to power was with the consent of his father, as the chosen heir, or whether it was a *coup d'etat.* However, the *Apratigha* Type coin design suggests that Kumāragupta I took the throne as a young prince with the consent of his father and mother.[21] The date for his ascent to the throne is understood to be between GE 93 (AD 412) and GE 96 (AD 415).[22] However, these can now be questioned in light of new numismatic evidence with coins dated as early as SE 329 as well as in GE 87 (AD 407). The reverse legend on these coins proclaims him as "*Mahārājadhirāja* Kumāragupta," confirming that by this date, he had also declared himself as the Great King of Kings. How is this date of AD 407 possible when we have a later inscription of Chandragupta II from Sānchī with a date of GE 93 (AD 412)? Could Kumāragupta I have been given the charge to finally eliminate the Kṣatrapa control of the west and the seaports, while Chandragupta II was still on the throne? Had he sufficiently proven himself which led to Chandragupta II to pick him over Govindagupta, the elder brother and legitimate heir, to ascend to the throne? Based on these dates, we can surmise that by AD 407 Kumāragupta I had declared himself as *Mahārājadhirāja* on the western front, while his father continued to rule concurrently in the East for another five. Again, numismatic evidence now corrects the historical dates and causes a review of the history as it is written today.[23]

Silver coins issued by Kumāragupta I with dates in both the Śaka Era and Gupta Era confirms that Kumāragupta I was in control of at least some of the Kṣatrapa mints by this time, well before the assumed date of accession of AD 415 assigned by scholars based on his Bilsād Pillar Inscription dated GE 96, and now should be corrected to assume that Kumāragupta I had assumed power in the west by GE 87 (AD 407). The Sānchī Stone Inscription confirms that Chandragupta II was still in power up to GE 93 (AD 413), and somewhere between AD 413 and 415, Kumāragupta I may have been coronated, the scene captured on the *Apratigha* Type coins. During his reign, the Kṣatrapas were finally defeated in the west. In the east, Kumāragupta gained control over part of greater Bengal. The last date seen on his silver coins is dated GE 131 (AD 451). His reign lasted for approximately 42 years as can be inferred from the coins of Skandagupta with the earliest dates of GE 130 (AD 449)[24] as well as the Junāgaḍh inscription of GE 136 (AD 455) confirms that by this time, Skandagupta was by this time fully in control of the Gupta army and throne.

While Kumāragupta I is busy with putting down the Kṣatrapas on the western front, his elder

20. Mookerji 1947: 74–75.

21. Bakker 2006: 165–87.

22. The *terminus post quem* is derived from Chandragupta II's last known inscription at Sānchī, and the *terminus ante quem* comes from the first known inscription of Kumāragupta I, the Bilsād Stone Pillar Inscription dated GE 96.

23. This practice of issuing coins in the capacity as a *yuvrājā,* prior to his ascent to the royal throne, seems to have been a common Gupta tradition, one followed once again by Skandagupta when he is given the charge of vanquishing the aggressors to the Gupta empire on the western front at the end of the reign of Kumāragupta I. Inscriptions and dates are assumed here to have used the current year 1 = the start of AD 319 up to AD 320, instead of elapsed year (i.e., AD 320 would be elapsed year 1).

24. Coin nos. **902**, **909**, and **910** on pp. 454–55 with the early date of GE 130 (AD 449), confirms that by this time, Skandagupta was able to issue coins in his name.

brother Govindagupta is in Vidiśā, possibly as a Governor, as he is only referred to as a *Mahārāja*, as seen in the Vaiśālī sealing. Ghaṭotkachagupta seemed to be much younger in age than Kumāragupta I and similar in age to his niece, the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatīgupta's daughter. During this time, the Vākāṭakas in the west were under the influence of the quite old queen regent (and a prior Gupta princess) Prabhāvatīgupta. Under her guidance and control she had ensured good relations with the Guptas. Bakker suggests that she, along with Kumāragupta I, decided on the marriage of Prabhāvatīgupta's daughter to her uncle Ghaṭotkachagupta in order to consolidate power and usher in three decades of cultural and economic prosperity.[25] After the death of Prabhāvatīgupta in AD 443, the Vākāṭaka–Gupta relations soured, and with an aging Kumāragupta I, the struggle for the Gupta throne began once again.

At this stage, Ghaṭotkachagupta likely made an attempt for the Gupta throne and issued his gold coins. Based on the fact that only three specimens are known, it is assumed that he did not survive long after this rebellion. A silver coin of Ghaṭotkachagupta has been published and the date on this coin has been corrected to read GE 140 (AD 459).[26] We also know of silver and lead coins issued by both Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta with the dates of GE 130 and 131 (AD 450-1). These dates suggest that while the old king Kumāragupta I was still in power, Skandagupta was slowly gaining power and issuing coins in his name concurrently. The Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena II, naturally sided with his uncle as well as his brother-in-law Ghaṭotkachagupta seems to have marched on Malwa, where they were summarily defeated by prince Skandagupta, tasked with "uprooting" these invaders. The Junāgaḍh inscription describes these events, Skandagupta then "rendered devoid of poison, the Serpent Rulers (i.e., the Nāgas) who had uplifted their hoods in pride and arrogance."[27] Even though Purugupta, who was the heir apparent and eldest son of Kumāragupta I and Anantadevī, as well as the legal heir to the Gupta throne, was passed on by the very powerful Skandagupta, who by now was fully in control of the Gupta army after a very successful military campaign in the west. The Bhitarī Stone Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta states:

> (Verse 4)...as he was intent upon steadying the tottering Sovereignty of the House (of Guptas)..., (Verse 6) Who, with enemies conquered by the strength of (his) arm, established again the Sovereignty of the House (of Guptas) that had turned adrift when his father repaired to heaven; (and) delighted because he had won, he approached (his) mother whose eyes were full of tears, just as Krishna did Devaki when he had slain (his) foe.[28]

While the Bhitarī Stone Pillar Inscription records Skandagupta's assassination of his uncle Ghaṭotkacha, the Rāmtek Kevala Narasiṁha Temple Inscription also records the death of Ghaṭotkachagupta and states that Pravarasena II brought his widowed sister back to his own residence with force.[29]

According to the Buddhist literary text *Chandragarbha Sutra*, Skandagupta as a young prince was given the task of defeating foreign invaders and waged a fierce battle for twelve years, ultimately capturing and executing the three kings who had dared to raise their heads against the Gupta king. "On his return, his father crowned him king, saying, henceforth rule the kingdom, and

25. Bakker 2006: 165–87.

26. K. Singh 2018 suggested a date of GE 134 (AD 453); however, Todd and Fishman in their forthcoming book suggest that the correct reading of this date is GE 140 (AD 459), which is the correct date on this coin (see pp. 427–29).

27. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 302, verses 2–3.

28. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 316.

29. Bakker Vidiśā:15.

himself retired to religious life."[30] These three foreign invaders were the Sasanians, the Kuṣāṇa Śakas, and the Hūṇas.[31] The true story behind Skandagupta's accession to the Gupta throne may be different from the narrative in these texts, as numismatic evidence suggests there may also have been rivals to the Gupta throne. Historical consensus had long placed Skandagupta's ascent to the Gupta throne around AD 455, a date inferred from the Junāgaḍh Rock Inscriptions. Yet, this narrative faces revision in light of newly published coins bearing the date GE 130 (AD 449), which unmistakably suggest Skandagupta's governance over portions of the Gupta Empire six years prior to the previously accepted timeline, particularly in the empire's western regions. These findings hint at the possibility that Skandagupta might have begun issuing lead coins within the western Kṣatrapa area before officially taking the throne in the eastern domains. Due to the absence of dates on gold coins, pinning down their exact year of minting remains elusive. It is plausible that the King and Lakṣmī Type gold coins were minted to mark his coronation in AD 455, as supported by his Junāgaḍh inscriptions.

Meanwhile, Kumāragupta I's era appears to conclude around AD 450, as evidenced by the Mankuwar stone image inscription from GE 129 (AD 449) and a silver coin from GE 131 (AD 451). Further inscriptions reveal the significant crises that plagued the Gupta dynasty towards Kumāragupta's tenure's end, showcasing Skandagupta's martial valor in overcoming adversaries to uphold the Gupta legacy. Notably, the depiction of Lakṣmī holding a lotus on the King and Lakṣmī Type gold coins, distinct from previous royal representations, aligns with Junāgaḍh inscriptions portraying her divine choice of Skandagupta as a consort.

Skandagupta's path to the throne, marked by the absence of his mother's name in records, has sparked debates about his legitimacy. His command over the Gupta military and western victories likely propelled him to power, sidelining his elder step-brother Purugupta in a dynastic tradition of succession. While Purugupta's precise role remains uncertain, evidence suggests he may have aimed for kingship, issuing silver coins around AD 457, with future discoveries potentially clarifying his status.[32]

The era between GE 132 and GE 139 (AD 451–458) was rife with internal strife, evident from the halt in minting silver and lead coins in the Western regions of Gujarat as well as in the Madhyadeśa region of Ujjain-Vidiśā, thus pointing to governance disruptions. Despite this, inscriptions from AD 455–457 hint at military successes but this is not supported by numismatic evidence. A solitary coin (coin no. **863**) with a date of GE 136 (AD 455) is known to exist. If Skandagupta was in full control of the western provinces during these years, coins with his name and dates should have been issued, but they were not. The period also saw the emergence of coins from Purugupta and Ghaṭotkachagupta, indicating the competitive claims to the throne and the empire's prevailing instability and economic strains.

Crucially, coins dated GE 134 (AD 453) and GE 140 (AD 459) underline significant phases in Gupta history, showcasing Ghaṭotkachagupta's control over the Central Provinces until AD 453, backed by the Vākāṭakas. Junāgaḍh inscriptions dated AD 455–456 reveal Skandagupta's victory over the Vākāṭaka-Ghaṭotkacha forces, but this must have been only in the western region. The actual subjugation of the Ghaṭotkacha/Vākāṭaka alliance must have only been right after GE 140 (AD 459), as evidenced by the solitary silver coin of Ghaṭotkachagupta issued with a date of GE 140 and his death in battle at the hands of Skandagupta recorded in Rāmtek Stone Inscription/Kevala Narasimha temple inscription. Nonetheless, Skandagupta's full consolidation over the Madhyadeśa

30. P. L. Gupta: 1992.

31. Jayaswal 1934: 34.

32. Todd and Fishman, forthcoming book on Gupta silver coinage. A solitary silver coin of Purugupta in the British Museum (coin OR.9560) has a date of GE 137 (AD 456). My thanks to Alex Fishman for bringing this coin for this book to my attention.

region only materialized post-Ghaṭotkachagupta's defeat, evidenced by the reintroduction of regional coinage (*Madhyadeśa* Type silver coins) from GE 140 up to GE 149. This numismatic record corroborates historical narratives of Skandagupta's efforts to stabilize and reunify the Gupta Empire following periods of rebellion and conflict. By AD 468, Skandagupta's rule comes to an end. How he died and who filled the void is not yet known to us. He does not seem to have had any progeny, as no epigraphical evidence has yet come to light.

Thaplyal places Purugupta at AD 467–473 assuming he took the throne after Skandagupta; however, there is no evidence to support such dates. This controversial issue of the ascent of Purugupta to the throne is touched upon in the section on Archer|Lotus Type gold coins with obverse symbols.[33] These coins exhibit substantial variations in metal purity and design, which Altekar and other scholars assumed to be issues of Chandragupta II. So far, we have not found any gold coins with the name of Purugupta to justify his royal ascent to the throne.[34] Some scholars had proposed that a few heavy weight coins with obverse symbols were issued by a new king Chandragupta III who came to power between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta sometime in the late fifth century.[35] While this entire issue is discussed further in the book (section 6.3), it is now clear that there was no new king issuing coins with the name of Chandra prior to Skandagupta. In keeping with the Gupta dynasty tradition, we do see additional minor Gupta kings continue to reuse the names Samudragupta, Chandragupta, and Kumāragupta, but these kings appeared much later towards the end of fifth century AD.

The Gupta dynastic line continued through the descendants of Purugupta; however, who the direct descendants of Purugupta are is not completely clear, and at this time the genealogy starts to become murky. We do know of a new Kumāragupta (II)[36] from the Sārnāth inscription dated to GE 154 (AD 473),[37] whose lineage is unclear. Scholars seem to be very confused on the attribution of the coins to this Kumāragupta II and another later king called Kumāragupta III. In fact, Altekar failed to recognize the existence of the later Kumāragupta III.[38]

A king by the name of Narasiṁhagupta *Bālādityaḥ* seems to have taken the Gupta throne sometime after Skandagupta, possibly even after Budhagupta. It is possible that this Kumāragupta II could have been yet another much later-born son of Purugupta. Around this time, we also find gold coins issued by another king calling himself Samudragupta (II) and another new Chandragupta (III).[39] Who these minor kings were and how long they lasted is not clear because there are no supporting inscriptions or epigraphic evidence.

Budhagupta was another son of Purugupta and is known from a large number of inscriptions, seals. A few coins in gold as well as silver are also well documented.[40] Fortunately, his silver coins

33. These coins exhibit substantial variations in metal purity and design, which Altekar and other scholars assumed to be issues of Chandragupta II. In recent years, Tandon has incorrectly tried to assign a group of coins to a new unknown king, Chandragupta III, who according to him, appeared prior to Kumāragupta I, but this theory has been shown to be incorrect and is discussed ahead in detail in the metrology section (Chapter 6).

34. See Kumar 2023. I correct the narrative that had recently developed and taken a life of its own.

35. It is not possible to assign a clear date for this minor king Chandragupta III, but based on numismatic evidence, we can assume his reign was very short and before that of Kumāragupta II. Also. the weight of 9.08 g fits before the reign of Kumāragupta III.

36. Todd and Fishman have identified a silver *Madhyadeśa* Type coin with date of GE 151 with name of "Kumāragupta." This late date, with the name of Kumāragupta could only apply to the Kumāragupta II that came after Skandagupta.

37. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 322.

38. Altekar 1957: 273.

39. This evidence comes from a solitary coin with name of Chandragupta with a *Śrīvatsa* symbol.

40. The obverse design of the king on Budhagupta Archer Type coins is identical to a few coins struck for Skandagupta's Archer Type, and were likely designed at the same mint by same die carvers. This very unusual and unique style is only seen in a few Skandagupta gold coins and then reappears later for Budhagupta gold coins confirming that the same craftsmen possibly produced both of these coins for two different kings, over a short time (i.e., end of Skandagupta's reign and start of Budhagupta's reign).

have dates inscribed on them in Gupta Era, and these dates help us to pinpoint the start of his reign from at least GE 157 (AD 476) to GE 165 (AD 484), while the Shankarpur copper plate donation shows that he was still ruling in year GE 168 (AD 488). His gold coins show his name on the obverse, as well as his biruda *Srī Vikramaḥ*. The Chinese traveler Hiuen-Tsang suggests that Budhagupta came to power after forcibly removing his brother, which could have been this Kumāragupta (II) of the Sārnāth inscription.[41] This tradition of fratricide was well-established and should not come as a surprise to anyone studying Gupta history.

The Buddhist text *Ārya-Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa* (*AMK*), dated approximately to the sixth century AD, provides a version of Gupta history as was understood by its author at that time. It states that "after the death of Budhagupta, two kings in Gupta line were crowned, one in Māgadha and another in Gauda." Majumdar and Mookerji believe that this refers to Bhānugupta ruling in Malwa, Vainyagupta ruling in Bengal, and Narasiṁhagupta ruling in Māgadha.[42] Bhānugupta, referred to simply as Śrī Bhānugupta, is mentioned in an Ērāṉ inscription of AD 510, but we do not have his genealogy. Goyal, on the basis of *AMK*, claims that Vainyagupta was a son of a new, later king Chandragupta (III)[43] who himself was the son of Budhagupta.[44] Even though Skandagupta seemed to have control over the western territories during his reign, by the time of Budhagupta the Gupta control over the western region and Vidiśā seems to be slowly waning.[45] The Ērāṉ Stone Pillar Inscription of AD 484 does reference his control over the Narmada region suggesting that at least during this time, Budhagupta had regained some authority in the west.[46]

By the end of the fifth century AD, the Hūṇās had commenced their advance into India under Hūṇā king Toramāṇa, taking advantage of the now quite weak and a slowly disintegrating Gupta empire. The Aulikaras controlled the Malava region under the firm rule of Prakāśadharman. Toramāṇa eventually seems to have gained control of the region from Punjāb to Kaśi and Kauśāmbī in Uttar Pradesh. A sealing unearthed at Kauśāmbī bears both the seal of the Ghoṣitārāma monastery and Toramāṇa confirming his presence at site.[47] Another sealing with the title Hūṇarāja has also been found in the excavations at the same site.[48]

Upon taking over Gupta territories, the Hūṇā king Toramāṇa issued gold coins, which emulated the Gupta coins, but also had the characteristic elongated head shape seen on the Hūṇā coins. On these coins he takes on a Gupta style name of Prakāśāditya. Using a reconstructed reading of the obverse legend on his Horseman|Lion-Slayer Type coins, it has been proposed this king may be the Hūṇā king Toramāṇa.[49] These gold coins issued by a king called Prakāśāditya, which also included the familiar device of the *Garuḍadhvaja*, a mainstay design element of Gupta coins. As was the tradition by the Gupta mints when introducing new coins into the newly conquered territories, the new gold coins designed for Toramāṇa were very similar to the Gupta gold coins already in circulation around the Punjāb to Kaśhi region.

41. Thaplyal 2012: 286.

42. R. C. Majumdar 2006: 191, and Mookerji 1943: 120.

43. A later minor king using this same name, but who seems to be present around time of Budhagupta.

44. Goyal 2005: 446.

45. The only silver coins found so far for Budhagupta are the *Madhyadeśa* Type coins from the Vidhisha region. None of the silver Gujarat style coins have been found nor any lead coins with his name, thus confrming that by this time, these western territories were no longer under control of Budhagupta. The find spots for his inscriptions and copper plates are known to us only from Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal (see tables, pp. 108–15).

46. Bakker 2015: 48. Bakker is correct in surmising that the total lack of honorifics suggests a weakening control over the west.

47. G. R. Sharma 1960. *Excavations at Kaushambi*, pp. 115–16. His presence at site is deduced from the fact that both the seal of Ghoṣitārāma monastery and Toramāṇa would have to be have been applied at the same time when the clay was wet.

48. A. Ghose 1954–55. "Indian Archaeology—A Review," p. 18, pl. XXXII, B.

49. Tandon 2015: *JARS* 25.4: 647–68.

The Rishtal inscription of Prakāśadharman dated Malwa Era 572 (AD 515) confirms that he defeated Toramāṇa in battle. It is assumed that Yaśodharman succeeded his father Prakāśadharman. A new seal of Hūṇā king Toramāṇa published ahead (pp. 475–77) confirms that Toramāṇa continued to serve as a vassal under Yaśodharman. It is only after Toramāṇa dies, that his son Mihirakula declared his independence.[50] A later inscription dated Malwa Era 589 (AD 532) from Mandasor records that Yaśodharman defeated Mihirakula, and banished him to Kāśmīr.

In addition to Prakāśāditya, we also find a few coins issued by a new king who refers to himself on his gold coins as Parākramadityaḥ, assuming the biruda of *Parākramaḥ*, which was originally the biruda of Samudragupta I. This is in addition to another Samudragupta II known to us from a solitary gold coin, which shows the name Samudra on its obverse. To add to the confusion, we also have to consider another series of gold coins issued very close to the Parākramadityaḥ coins, but on these the king has used the title Vikramādiytaḥ. Each of these later kings issued only the Archer Type gold coins with the *Garuḍadhvaja*.

Vainyagupta is known to us not just from his Nālandā seal,[51] but also from the Guṇaighar copper plate inscription of year GE 188 (AD 507).[52] His coins show the Brāhmī letter *Bha* between his feet on the obverse, could be a reference to Bhānugupta, who may be his father.[53] On the Guṇaighar grant, Vainyagupta is referred to as a Śaivite (a devotee of Śiva) as well as a most devout devotee of Viṣṇu, as stated in the Nālandā seal (*Parama bhāgavata*) which clearly shows that he was quite liberal in his religious views and officially supported both Hindu sects. This tolerant view of religion is discussed in the section dealing with the birudas (pp. 24–30) and religion (pp. 54–77), as it is clear that for the Gupta kings their religious views were very liberal from the early days of the dynasty. Starting with Śrīgupta and Samudragupta whose clay sealings feature a trident (pp. 197, 278), all the way to Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, each of them issued coinage with a trident on their silver coins in addition to the *Garuḍadhvaja* on their gold coins, confirming that in addition to being devout Vaishnaivites, they had no hesitancy in proclaiming their devotion for the Śaivite faith because the silver coins were probably local issues for specific territories.

A second Narasiṁhagupta (II) is known from the genealogy listed on the Nālandā seals as well as the Bhitarī seals of the third Kumāragupta (III) and he also seemed to have taken the Gupta throne as evidenced by his debased coins.[54] P. L. Gupta argued against the existence of two Narasiṁhagupta and questioned why the weights of the son Kumāragupta II are lighter than the coins issued by the father Narasiṁhagupta II (contradicting Gresham's Law). He posed the same question with relation to the debasement seen in the coins.[55] Coins attributed to Narasiṁhagupta II are, in fact, heavier and of a lower purity level than the coins of Narasiṁhagupta I, thereby confirming that there were, in fact, two kings using the name Narasiṁhagupta with the same biruda, *Bālādityaḥ*. Goyal was correct in his assessment that the statement in *Ārya-Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa* that "*Bālādityaḥ* ruled peacefully without any rival and committed suicide at the age of thirty-six years and one month" refers to the first *Bālādityaḥ*, Narasiṁhagupta I. Furthermore, he was also correct in suggesting that the reference to a Buddhist King *Bālādityaḥ* who conquered Mihirakula was in fact a reference to the later Narasiṁhagupta II.

50. Mandasor inscription uses the title *nṛpa* (= "king") for Mihirakula.

51. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 319.

52. Bhattacharya 1930.

53. Thaplyal 2012. The AMK also refers to a *Bha* beginning the name (see discussion, p. 299).

54. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 354–60. This new Narasiṁhagupta II comes much later, and is separated by decades from the first Narasiṁhagupta.

55. See the metrology/metal analysis section as well as the section dealing with the Gupta kings after Skandagupta, where it is shown that the coins of Narasiṁhagupta I are, in fact, heavier and of similar purity level as coins of Kumāragupta II.

Kumāragupta III succeeded Narasiṁhagupta II as evidenced from the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* which states that "*Bala* was succeeded by Kumāra."[56] What we do see is Kumāragupta III's gold coins are heavily debased and the majority of the known specimens were found in the Kalighat Hoard (see pp. 485, 486).[57] Kumāragupta III coins always have a Brāhmī letter *go, ja, Jo* between the king's feet on the obverse, and the coins seem to be missing an obverse circular legend. The biruda on the reverse of his coins is Śrī Kramājita, which helps us to differentiate his coins from prior coins issued by other kings using the same name. He is then followed by the last known Gupta king, Viṣṇugupta (AD 543), who continued to issue even more debased gold coins as the Gupta Empire fully disintegrated, and the dynasty ends by AD 550.[58] These Gupta kings after Skandagupta and related numismatic evidence supporting each of them is discussed ahead, revealing that there were as many as fifteen different Gupta kings who issued gold coins between Skandagupta and Viṣṇugupta.

As history has shown us, when there is stability and peace the arts flourish. This can also be seen in the many different types and varieties of coins that were created during the early part of the dynasty up to Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. However, once the dynasty started its decline, we find only a single Archer Type coin design issued by the later Gupta kings (after Skandagupta). With such a vast coinage it is only natural for us to assume that over time we will find new varieties, and possibly even new types. It is very possible that new Gupta kings may also come to light, as seen by the discovery of the gold coin of a yet unknown Gupta king with the name *Parākramadityaḥ* (coin **955**).[59] From this coin design we were able to approximate the time period (early sixth century AD); the high purity of the gold content indicates the relative strength of the treasury, and the use of the biruda *Parākramadityaḥ* provides us clues to the possible name of the king and his grand ambitions. Did he fancy himself as powerful as Samudragupta or possibly even taken on that name?

By the early sixth century AD, the Hūṇās had established a foothold in northern and central India. Numismatic data, seals, and inscriptions discussed ahead confirm their presence. In the early years of the sixth century, the Gupta empire had been reduced to smaller fragmented kingdoms ruled by minor *Rājās* and *Māhārājās*. Which of these kings controlled which territory is not fully clear, but based on find spots for the coins, it is apparent that these last few Gupta kings centered around present day Bengal and the eastern Uttar Pradesh and parts of the Ujjain region. The AD 532 Mandsaur Stone Inscription of Yaśodharman confirms that the Aulikaras were victorious in battles against these "northern kings," i.e., Hūṇās.[60] The Pillar 1 inscription also confirms that by AD 532, the Hūṇā king Mihirakula had been defeated by the confederation of kings along with Yaśodharman, thus ending Hūṇā rule in India.

From a numismatic standpoint, we do not see a substantial or a robust gold coinage after this event. Even a few decades prior to this defeat, the only gold coins we find are few and far between such as the gold coins with the names of *Prakāśāditya*, *Parākramadityaḥ,* and *Vikramādiytaḥ* with distinctively different designs struck to emulate Gupta coinage. Coins also issued by later Gupta kings, Vainyagupta up to Viṣṇugupta, are only found in very small numbers and eventually these end up as a highly debased coinage, which points to a major breakdown of the trade and commerce without a centralized royal authority. This economic decline leads to the eventual end of the Gupta dynastic rule by the third–fourth decades of the sixth century AD. Around AD 536, India enters a dark age. The last half of the sixth century India seems to be a period of decline in the economy and socio-cultural systems and trade. We do not see any new gold coinage, nor any new dynastic power

56. Goyal 2005: 310.

57. See Kumar 2017, pp. 112–13. Chapter: "The Kalighat Hoard—A Reappraisal."

58. As per the Jaina text Ādi purāṇa, which states that the Gupta Dynasty lasted 231 years; see Pathak 1976.

59. See Kumar 2010.

60. Fleet 1888. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum: Inscriptions of the Early Guptas*. Vol. III. Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publications Branch, 1888, pp. 147–48; Kielhorn, *Miscellanea Revisions to Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III; John Fleet 1889, Indian Antiquary, Vol.XVIII, 1889, p. 219. *Gupta Inscriptions*.

emerging to fill this vacuum of a central authority like the Guptas. A powerful central authority under the Gupta rule had provided security and peace for a vibrant cultural and religious revival. Trade and arts had flourished, but now that was at an end. This period in northern and central India should be considered the Dark Ages of the sixth century, but no one has been able to answer why. The Hūṇās were gone by this time, but so were the Guptas.

The Justinian Plague[61]

What happened in the following decades, and why do we have no records of this dark age of the back half of sixth century AD in India? What led to a sudden decline in religion and cultural practice and an absence of another new central ruling authority issuing a viable new gold coinage in their name, providing stability for trade? Instead, there is a void; inscriptional data is sparse and nearly silent during this period. No new gold coinage is seen during this back half of the sixth century AD, pointing to a major disruption in trade. The Maukharīs of Kannauj seem to slowly emerge as the dominant force in the region in the sixth–seventh centuries, but their coinage is limited to mostly crude silver coins.

The Haraha Stone Inscription of King Īśanavarman of the Maukharīs Dynasty dated Vikram Saṃvat 611 (AD 554) provides to us vital clues on events during the preceding decades. This inscription was found in a Bārā Banki district and moved to the Lucknow Museum in 1915. It records the rebuilding of a dilapidated Śiva temple by Sūryavarman, the "accomplished" son of Īśanavarman in V. 611, who had it rebuilt to a bigger and higher level and named this temple Kṣēmēśvara. In this eulogy, the poet lists multiple references to a breakdown of the social fabric and religious and cultural norms, and the onset of the Kali Yuga and is the first epigraphic documentation of a plague that seems to have ravaged across central India, breaking down the long-established systems of a civilized society.[62] In particular, verses 9, 12, 14, and 15 are most telling of this calamity:

> (V.9): "…the world which was sunk in the darkness of the Kali Yuga, where the paths of virtue were consequently obscured..."
> (V.12): "…where the intensity of the storm of the Kali age, which had surrounded the whole world…"
> (V.14): "…the world being encompassed in darkness and bewildered as to the beginning, the middle or the end of the day on account of the dust which rises from the earth…"
> (V.15): "By whom the earth was forcibly upheld like a broken boat, after fastening it on all sides by hundredfold virtues, when it was sinking below the invisible ocean of the nether regions, being shaken by the storms of Kali;"

What could have led to such a breakdown to the social order and the discontinuance of religious practices and sacrifices? A social crisis enveloped north and central India, which is evident from the use of terms showing the anxiety of the author of this sixth-century inscription narrating a time when the very fabric of society had broken down, a dark age descended upon the lands, creating

61. S. Kumar, 2024. "The Justinian Plague And The Kali-Yuga In Sixth Century CE India," *Kalālpa* VIII.2: 1–14.

62. *Epigraphia Indica*, 1917–18, Vol. X: 14. "Haraha Inscription of the Reign of Īśanavarman, [Vikram Saṃvat] 611, pp. 110–20. I would like to extend by thanks to Prof. Deena Bandhu Pandey and Dr. Prashant Kulkarni for their help with the transliteration of these four verses.

political, social, and economic upheaval with a general breakdown of the legal, cultural, and social code of conduct.[63]

The key to solving this mystery lies in what was taking place outside of India that would have left a significant and lasting effects over northern and central India:

- The famous Byzantine historian, Procopius of Caesaria, wrote about the events of AD 536–537: One of the greatest wonders took place that year, he wrote: "the whole year the sun shone like the moon, without rays, as if it was going to lose its power. It did not shine as clearly and brightly as before. Ever since then, there were wars among people, pestilence, and other calamities that brought death with them."[64]
- According to a study published by climate scientists, "…[the years] between 534 and 545… were the most dramatic in the history of the medieval world because the mean annual temperatures fell to their lowest in the northern hemisphere in the last 2000 years."[65]
- Ice cores collected in Antarctica and tree-ring data from Greenland confirm that volcanic eruptions in c. AD 535–36 in the northern hemisphere and in AD 541 in the tropics led to environmental cataclysm and eventual cooling temperatures caused by the dust veil that lasted for almost 18 months.[66]

In AD 542, the Justinian Plague arrived in Constantinople through trade from the east, via the Silk Road, over land and the sea, and via the Red Sea ports in Egypt. These routes connected directly with India as detailed in the *Periplus maris Erythræi*, the Greek text for the sea captains sailing between Roman Egypt and the west coast of India.[67] The plague pathogen reached the Roman Empire at Egypt's ports of Berenike and Pelisium, and traveled through the Roman trade networks across the Empire around the Mediterranean via the shipborne rats and infected fleas. It is not clear where this pathogen *Yersinia pestis* originated. Some of the foci of this plague have ancient origins, which have been traced back to the foothills of the Himalayas and China, as well as a "plague reservoir" around Lake Victoria in Kenya and Tanzania, in Africa. It is also possible that the plague originated in Africa and then traveled back to India via shipborne rats.[68]

The collapse of the Gupta dynasty around AD 543 and the ensuing socio-cultural decline in central India during that period can also be attributed to a series of catastrophic events. The AD 536 volcanic winter, caused by at least three simultaneous volcanic eruptions, was a dramatic episode of climatic cooling in the northern hemisphere, marking the beginning of the Late Antique Little Ice Age which lasted until AD 560.

This period was characterized by significantly lower temperatures, which led to crop failures, famines, and a general destabilization of societies. As described in contemporary accounts, the immediate effects included darkened skies, weak sunlight, and unseasonable weather patterns, as

63. S. C. Mishra. "Interpreting the Social Crisis of the Kali Age: An Epigraphic View from Haraha Stone Inscription," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 62 (2001): 123–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44155753.

64. Procopius. *History of the Wars*, Vol. I: Books 1–2. (Persian War). Translated by H. B. Dewing. Loeb Classical Library 48. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914, p. 574.

65. Ganiev 2014. "The Climate Cooling of 536–545 AD and the Rise of the Turkic Empire," *Life Sci J* 11(12): 497. http://www.lifesciencesite.com.

66. S. Helama, L. Arppe, J. Uusitalo, *et al.* "Volcanic dust veils from sixth century tree-ring isotopes linked to reduced irradiance, primary production and human health," *Sci Rep* 8, p. 1339. doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-19760-w; also see Zielinski 2015, "Sixth-Century Misery Tied not One, but Two Volcanic Eruptions, Anthropocene," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 8 July 8 2015.

67. Harry Falk, 2023. "Who Blocked the Nāneghāṭ? Reflections on Nahapāna, Sandanēs, and the Sātavāhanas." Academia.edu.

68. Lee Mordechai, 2021. "The Justinianic Plague: Pressing Questions, Interdisciplinary Answers?" *Winds of Change, Environment and Society in Anatolia*, p. 196.

described in contemporary accounts.[69] Although the impact of these climatic changes in India is explicitly less documented, it is now clear that the resultant global cooling and agricultural disruption could have contributed to the onset of this dark age referred to in the Haraha Stone Inscription.

Tree ring analysis and ice core samples indicate a significant reduction in solar radiation due to sulfate aerosols in the atmosphere, consistent with volcanic activity.[70] Several significant volcanic eruptions during this period have been identified as potential causes of the climatic anomalies. These environmental stresses coincided with the Justinian Plague, contributing to a profound social and cultural upheaval, including mass migrations, and possibly even influencing religious and mythological narratives.[71] The combined impact of these natural disasters on agriculture, economy, and health would have strained the socio-political structures of the time, leading to the decline of the Gupta dynasty and subsequent changes in the cultural fabric of central India in the ensuing decades.

This collapse of the Gupta Empire in central India around the sixth century AD, coinciding with climatic changes and the Justinian Plague, can be understood through a combination of internal and external factors. The Gupta Empire, once flourishing under Samudragupta I, Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I, and Skandagupta, began to falter under the successive Gupta kings. This decline was marked by military defeats and weakening leadership. The empire faced significant internal challenges, including rebellions such as those by the Puṣyamitras and the invasion of the Hūṇas. These Hūṇā invasions, particularly by the White Huns (Western Hūṇā or Hephthalites), caused considerable damage to the empire. The cumulative effect of these challenges led to the empire's fragmentation into regional kingdoms by AD 540 following a series of weak rulers and continued invasions. This disintegration was a gradual process, exacerbated by the climatic changes, including the effects of the volcanic winter of AD 536 and 541 and the onset of a devastating plague for which there was no cure or escape, leading into the dark age, the Kali Yuga of the sixth century.

69. Cassiodorus (T. Hodgkin, trans., 1886. *The Letters of Cassiodorus*, pp. 518–20. London: Henry Frowde. See esp.: "25. Senator, Praetorian Praefect, to his deputy Ambrosius, an *Illustris*."

70. S. Helama, L. Arppe, J. Uusitalo et al. 2018. "Volcanic dust veils from sixth-century tree-ring isotopes linked to reduced irradiance, primary production and human health," *Sci Rep* 8, 1339. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-19760-w.

71. L. B. Larsen, et al. 2008. "New ice core evidence for a volcanic cause of the AD 536 dust veil," *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 35(4): L04708. doi:10.1029/2007GL032450. Archived from the original on 6 June 2011. Retrieved 7 April 2008.

1.2. The Importance of Coins in Rewriting Gupta History

Our current understanding of ancient Indian history, particularly the Gupta dynasty, is still developing and should be approached with an open mind. Scholars and researchers should critically assess long-standing theories and assumptions, considering new discoveries and data. Historical interpretations, often based on inscriptions and sources analyzed decades ago, are not definitive and may require revision as new information emerges. It is important to recognize that our knowledge is shaped by a complex interplay of facts, biases, and theories, and that historical "facts" can change with ongoing research and discoveries.

Victorious kings always rewrote their version of history with new facts which they wanted to promote themselves. This is clearly evident as not much of a record survives of the lesser known Gupta kings: Rāmagupta, Kāchagupta, Govindagupta, Ghaṭotkachagupta, Purugupta, and others. One has to wonder about their actual places in the royal Gupta lineage and what happened that led them to be overthrown or bypassed by a sibling or a rival to the imperial Gupta throne. The victorious Gupta kings Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I, and Skandagupta completely wiped the slate clean. Virtually no inscriptions are found, nor any mention of their rivals in any of the later genealogical seals and inscriptions.

Any evidence found within the ancient Sanskrit drama *Devīchandraguptaṁ* must be approached with skepticism. It remains unclear if this play was in fact a ploy by Chandragupta II, through a royal mandate, to rewrite history to cover up his affair with Rāmagupta's wife. According to the narration in this Sanskrit drama, King Rāmagupta is coerced into signing a humiliating treaty with an unnamed Śaka king and as bounty he is forced to hand over his queen, Dhurvadevī, to the Śaka king. In the play, Chandragupta II, disguised as a lady, enters the Śaka king's camp to kill the king. Later, he also kills his elder brother Rāmagupta for humiliating the Gupta name by making such a deal with a hated enemy. Following that, the heroic Chandragupta II proceeds to marry Queen Dhruvadevī to rule over the vast Gupta Empire, and everyone lives happily ever after.

It is possible that the young prince Chandragupta II was in love with his elder brother's wife and killed his brother in order to marry Dhurvadevī and take over the royal throne. After committing this shameful act, he then proceeded to eradicate Rāmagupta's name from the official Gupta lineage and history. Alternatively, did Rāmagupta truly bring shame to the Gupta dynasty by surrendering to a Śaka king, which was then avenged and righted by Chandragupta II? Was the play a form of propagandic royal disinformation or even folklore propagated by the victor to cover up the truth? As will be shown below, numismatic evidence can help shine a light on this uncertain history.

As early as 1889, Vincent Smith[72] advocated a theory that Kācha and Rāmagupta were one and the same king. In 1893 he accepted Rapson' s theory that they were two different rulers.[73] Smith, Fleet, Sircar, Mookerji, Agrawal, Bhaṇḍarkar, Dandekar, Goyal, P. L. Gupta, and Sharma, while discussing Gupta history, have each opined on the identity of Kāchagupta. Their theories covered the full spectrum: that Kāchagupta was one and the same as Samudragupta I; Kācha was a shortened form of Ghaṭotkacha; he was one and the same as Rāmagupta; he was

72. Smith 1889: 13.

73. Smith 1893. "Observations on the Gupta Coinage." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 77–148. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25197132.

a usurper who did not belong to the Gupta dynasty at all; Kāchagupta may have been a rival brother of Samudragupta I and may have contested Samudragupta I's ascension to the throne.

Kāchagupta was not even considered part of the Gupta royal lineage by historians until the Bāyāna Hoard was found in 1946. Initially, the reason to keep him out of the Gupta lineage was because all gold coins of Kācha known up to then were missing the *Garuḍa* standard, which was the imperial standard of the dynasty.

Figure 1.1. Left: Kāchagupta holds a *Chakradhvaja* prior to taking the throne. PC, 1392.
Right: Kāchagupta stands facing a *Garuḍadhvaja* after ascending to the Gupta throne. PC, 1067.

Instead, the coins issued by Kācha featured a *Chakradhvaja* (wheel standard) on the obverse. Other than the absence of a *Garuḍadhvaja*, the coins were similar in design of the other Gupta gold coins. In 1946, within the Bāyāna Hoard, 16 coins of Kācha were found; 15 of these coins had the wheel standard and a solitary gold coin of Kācha prominently featured the *Garuḍa* standard. The presence of the *Garuḍa* standard conclusively established that Kācha had indeed ruled as a sovereign ruler over the Gupta Empire and hence deserved a place within the royal Gupta lineage. But this solitary gold coin with the *Garuḍadhvaja* clearly pointed to an issue by the royal mint and helped us answer those questions posited by earlier scholars: was this Kācha a lone character; was Kācha the original name of Samudragupta I; or was he one of the two kings named Ghaṭotkacha?

For the past three decades I have been on the hunt of the identity of two Gupta kings: Rāmagupta and Kāchagupta. Every time I came across hundreds of the tiny copper Rāmagupta coins, usually found in large groups, I would search through them to try to read the legends and get a hint as to the identity. Almost all of his copper coins mentioned either his name and/or his title, *Mahārāja Rāmaguptah*, on the reverse, or a *Garuḍa* bird on the obverse, the royal insignia of the Gupta kings. Rāmagupta is known only from his copper coins. No gold coins with his name have been found so far.

In 2011, I came across a small group of Rāmagupta copper coins within which there were two coins that caught my attention right away. One of the coins had the usual *Garuḍa* on the obverse, the royal symbol of the Guptas. Its reverse had a legend in Brāhmī script: *Rāmagupta.* The second copper coin was a little larger but had an *Aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) scene on it. The obverse of this coin was very similar to the *Aśvamedha* coins of Samudragupta I with the ribbons from the *Yūpa* flowing over the horse. Under the horse, prominently marked, was a compound Brāhmī letter: the name *Kācha.* On the reverse, it had the legend *Rāmaguptah Mahā[harāja]*. This coin seemed to be the missing link, a coin that conclusively proved that Rāmagupta's assumed name was Kācha and most probably he had assumed the name *Kācha*

by performing the holy *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. This coin helped fill one of the important and enigmatic gaps within the Gupta genealogy.[74]

For now, this coin should put an end to the debate about Rāmagupta and Kāchagupta. In the meantime, we at least have confirmation that both Gupta kings were in fact the same king. As both names were eradicated from royal Gupta inscriptions and genealogical records as the likely result of fratricide and a love affair, it is only the surviving coins that offer us the clues.[75]

We know today that the Gupta conquest of the western Kṣatrapas continued for the entire length of Chandragupta II's reign and into the first year of Kumāragupta I's reign when he finally conquered Sāurāṣṭra, a fact confirmed via the last known date from silver coins issued by Rudrasiṁha III with the Śaka era date of 337 (AD 415). These contradictions between folklore-based history and factual history in the context of Gupta numismatics have always fascinated historians, but can be solved via data seen on coins and inscriptions.

The inscriptions and seals of the Gupta kings and queens fortunately followed a formula, one that was repeated over centuries, where they listed the name of the king, his father (and sometimes mother), his grandfather, great grandfather, etc., as a form of establishing their lineage. Based on this, we can reconstruct the genealogy of the dynasty. Sometimes a good mystery helps bring out the sleuths in all of us. The question of lineage and succession of each of the Gupta kings, while very important in studying the coins, cannot be covered within the scope of this book. Suffice it to say, the debates continue, and scholars continue to point to various new readings of the old inscriptions and the new finds to make their arguments for unraveling an incomplete history.

Michael Willis addressed the Gupta genealogy most recently in 2005.[76] In comparing his work against the genealogy laid out by Altekar (1957), Chhabra (1986), and Goyal (2005), one can see that there was a gradual agreement on certain dates and in many cases total disagreement as to the timeline as well as the existence of certain Kings. Willis's dates for the reigns of Gupta kings mostly aligned with Goyal. In 2010, Thaplyal published one of the best works on the Gupta dynasty: *The Imperial Guptas: A Political History.* For the purposes of this book, I will be reviewing these dates proposed by earlier scholars and will suggest a few modifications based on the evidence found on Gupta coins.

While Gupta gold coins did not have dates, we do find that the silver and lead coins struck by Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I, and Skandagupta did have dates and mostly followed the Kṣatrapa tradition and list the Varṣā*:* the year, sometimes in the Śaka era and sometimes in the Gupta era. The Śaka era started in AD 78 and the Gupta era is considered to begin in AD 319 with the ascent of Chandragupta I to the throne. The date of AD 398 as the year of the start of the first phase of the conquest of eastern Gujarat and Malwa by Chandragupta II on the basis of numismatic evidence.[77] He published a silver coin of Chandragupta II that copied the contemporary Kṣatrapa silver coinage, with a date of Śaka 320 (AD 398). It took approximately two decades for the Guptas to finally subdue the Kṣatrapas and get control over the western region and its ports. The final conquest of the Suarashtra region seems finally to have been accomplished by Kumāragupta I with the defeat of Mahākṣatrapa Rudrasiṁha III. This conclusion is based on his silver coins with the last date of Śaka 337 (AD 415) as well as coin **743**, also with the same date.[78]

74. Kumar 2013.
75. It was a common practice to recall, melt, and restrike coins issued by adversaries.
76. Willis 2005.
77. Rajgor 2000: 281–93.
78. Rajgor 2000.

The Guptas, during their 250+ regnal years over the Indian subcontinent, issued a vast number of coins in gold, silver, copper, and lead. These tiny pieces of metal are miniature documents, time capsules recording events that are long forgotten. Each coin design has a reason it was made that way: the addition of a sword, or a battle-axe, a tiger or a rhinoceros all offer clues. The dates and competing imperial symbols such as *Garuḍa* or the three arched hills provide us information on where they were struck, events that were transpiring during that time, and may corroborate or contradict what we thought we knew of India's history.

Because of the noncorrosive nature of gold, these coins have survived the best. However, it is likely that hundreds of thousands of these gold coins have been melted and recycled into other coins and jewelry over the past 1,400+ years. The Gupta kings referred to their gold coins in their inscriptions as dīnāras, and this term would have been used by the earlier Kuṣāṇa kings. The Kuṣāṇa dynasty held sway over most of northern India, covering a swath that ran from what is now Uttar Pradesh with Mathurā as a major trading and religious center, to the northwest frontier province and parts of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Kuṣāṇas were prolific minters of gold coins, and it is their coin designs that were used by the early Gupta kings as the prototype for a new currency in their newly established kingdom.

The Kuṣāṇa gold dīnāras usually weighed between 7.80 and 8.0 g. The early Gupta coins were lighter than their Kuṣāṇa prototypes even though the designs of the Gupta gold coins closely copied those of the Kuṣāṇas: the portrayal of a king offering oblations at the *Yajña kuṇḍa* on the obverse; on the reverse, a goddess of fortune and abundance, Ardokṣo, seated either on a throne or on a lion, holding a cornucopia.

Gradually these Kuṣāṇa-inspired coin designs were "indianized," and we see innovative new designs in gold coins emerging from the Gupta mints. The Babylonian (Sumerian) goddess-on-lion, Nanā or NanāAmba, seen on the Kuṣāṇa coins, gets replaced by the goddess Durgā as Durgā *Siṁhavāhinī.* The Kuṣāṇa style of the goddess-on-throne, Ardokṣo, gets replaced by Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The cornucopia held by the goddess on the reverse of the Kuṣāṇa coins gets replaced by the lotus flower. Mukherjee notes, "the Kings were originally portrayed as rigid and majestic and to some extent frontal in their appearance. Stylistically they are affiliated with the Bactrian school of art."[79] This rigid portrayal transitioned into a uniquely Gupta style where the king was portrayed with a graceful and fluid figure standing in a *Tribhaṅgāsana,* wearing a *dhotī,* an Indian garment, instead of a jacket or a *kaftan* with trousers and boots.

Even though the weights of the gold coins issued by the early Gupta kings vary within a range of 7.0–7.80 g, the gold content of the coins remained very high. Over time, as the dynasty grew more powerful and established, the weights of the gold coins issued by the Gupta kings continued to rise, and by the time of Skandagupta the weight was up to the *suvarṇa* weight standard of 9.40 g. As the weight of the coins grew higher, the gold content declined progressively.[80] Occasional outliers are seen such as the high gold content of the coins of Prakāśāditya (82% Au) which was issued around AD 500. Such variations in weights and gold content provides clues to the state of the economy at the time of minting. A coin series issued by a king that maintained a consistent gold percentage would point to a stable economy and peaceful times. A sudden drop in the gold purity of this king would suggest economic turmoil either due to famines, plagues, or war. The XRF analysis done for the first time on ancient coins of India provided conclusive data for the economy and its challenges during the Gupta

79. Mukherjee 1969: 12.
80. The XRF analysis of the Gupta and Kṣatrapa coins is discussed in the Metrology section (Chapter 6).

era.[81] During the militaristic expansion of Samudragupta I, we can see a drop of gold purity in his early coinage as more resources were needed to wage battles and expand the empire. We see the same exact scenario develop in the evolution of Chandragupta II's gold coinage, which had the obverse symbols as identifiers of a debased coin, with a slightly heavier weight. The weight and obverse symbols unfortunately were interpreted by many scholars as issues of a new king, which they named Chandragupta III. A deep study of this theory led to the revelation that these obverse symbols did not identify a new king,[82] as much as they were put on the coins to confirm easily that they were minted with a lower purity of gold. It is only through the metal analysis of the gold coins that an important, yet incorrect theory of a new king could be conclusively debunked.

The diameter of Gupta gold coins ranges from 16–24 mm. A few issues, such as Variety A of the Lyrist and the Tiger-Slayer Type coins of Samudragupta I are always struck on a large flan in the range of 22–24 mm. A solitary coin of Samudragupta I's Javelin Type (PC, 1424) is struck on a 32 mm flan. While the full dīnāra version seemed to be the main medium of monetary value, it appears that during the time of Chandragupta II, a half-dīnāra coin was also struck for a very short time. Chandragupta II had conquered the Gujarat region and the western provinces, which were ruled by the western Kṣatrapa kings. The primary currency in those regions was silver and lead coins and not gold. Minor trade continued to be conducted with the use of Kuṣāṇa copper coins which were plentiful and in circulation during the Gupta times. From a Gupta era copper plate, we also know of the ancient silver *kārṣāpaṇas* coins which were also in use in those times.[83] It is possible that because of the expansion into the west, Gupta mints may have experimented with a half-dīnāra denomination to test its acceptance, and based on the three known specimens, it can be surmised that it was not fully embraced by the local population. The half-dīnāra gold coins were struck to a 15 mm diameter with a weight of 3.30 g (coin **363**). Prior to the Guptas, we know of fractional gold coins also issued by the Kuṣāṇa kings.

Figure 1.2. Vasudeva I Kuṣāṇa quarter-dīnāra. CNG XXV-5191. 1.97 g, 14 mm.

The Gupta kings with the most prolific gold mintage were Samudragupta I, Chandragupta II, and Kumāragupta I, which points to a prosperous economy and a rich royal treasury. Each of these kings in their own way introduced new varieties and types of coins featuring new designs to help propagate new agendas, announce new victories and new imperial messages to the masses through this unique medium. The visual message projected a very powerful monarch; the king in varied manners, from a slender powerful young man to an older king, richly bedecked in jewels, with a variety of weapons of war from the bow and arrow, a dagger, sword, javelin, or a battle-

81. Originally published in the first edition of this volume (and also ahead in Chapter 6).

82. Allan 1914; Smith 1906; Altekar *JNSI* 7, pp. 17–18; Sinha 1954; Nisar Ahmed 1965, pp. 177–83; P. L. Gupta 1974, pp. 354–55; P. L. Gupta 1981, pp. 26–43; P. L. Gupta and Srivastava 1981.

83. See section 5.5 (pp. 120–21).

axe, powerful and mighty riding a war horse, as an exterminator of other kings, as a brave hunter as well as a fierce warrior capable of fighting the mightiest of the beasts, whether they be tigers, lions, or rhinos. The kings were shown to be musically talented, all-powerful, and valorous, fearless yet subservient to—as well as ordained by—the gods. On the gold coins, the Gupta kings celebrate their reverence to the different religions (Vaiṣṇavite, Śaivite, Buddhism, Śaktism), calling out their battlefield victories, their lineage, and their marriage.

There are a total of 24 different types in the gold coins of the Gupta dynasty. Within each of these types we see multiple varieties differentiated by design, symbols, and legends. When we look at the vast variety of the gold coins found, it seems apparent that the mints were following prescribed rules when designing the coin dies. However, we see a large variation in how these design rules were interpreted by the individual die engravers. In the initial issues (i.e., gold coins issued by Chandragupta I, Kāchagupta, and Samudragupta I) we find a single legend inscribed on the obverse of each of the coins of the same type. For example, all the Javelin Type coins of Samudragupta I have the same obverse legend regardless of the differentiation in the designs (even though they were issued by multiple mints). The legends are written in Brāhmī script and Sanskrit language. The obverse legend on Javelin Type coins reads: *Samaraśatavitatavijayo jitaripurajito divaṃ jayati* (the invincible king who had won victories on a hundred battlefields and conquered the enemies wins the heaven). Approximately 45 years later, we see the mints slowly experimenting with designing coins with multiple legends within the same type of coins, starting with the *Chhatra* Type coins of King Chandragupta II which feature two distinct legends on the obverse within the same type. The gold coins of the Gupta kings can be divided into the following types:

King and Queen Type: Issued by Samudragupta I, Chandragupta II, and Kumāragupta I. This design type celebrates the origination of the Gupta dynasty and portrays Samudragupta I's parents, Chandragupta I and Kumāradevī, on the obverse. On the reverse we see a legend celebrating their marriage and the royal lineage—*Lichchhavayaḥ*—"Origins from Royal Bloodline of Lichchhavis," legitimizing Chandragupta I's royal connection to the Lichchhavi clan and the reason for Samudragupta I to be chosen as the heir apparent by his father over his other siblings. A solitary specimen of a King and Queen Type issued by Chandragupta II is also discussed here for the first time (p. 332) and also by Kumāragupta I (p. 393).

King and Lakṣmī Type: Issued by Skandagupta, which celebrated his ascent to the throne blessed by the goddess of fortune. On the obverse of these coins, the goddess Lakṣmī is shown giving him the divine blessing and approval to take the throne.

King and Queen on Couch Type, *Chakravikramaḥ* Type, Kārttikeya Type, *Apratigha* Type: These portray the king as ordained by the heavenly gods and serving at their pleasure. In the King and Queen on Couch Type of Chandragupta I, he can be seen further legitimizing his place as a devout ruler, proclaiming himself as a *Parama bhāgavata*, the most devout worshiper of Viṣṇu. This type is also referred to as the Vaikunṭha type.[84] On the *Chakravikramaḥ* Type, King Chandragupta II is shown as a *Chakravartin*—the ultimate accolade—more powerful than a king or an emperor. The Kārttikeya Type pays homage to the deity Kārttikeya, the Hindu god of war, after whom King Kumāragupta I was named. The *Apratigha* Type shows young prince Kumāragupta I coming to power and receiving blessings by his father and mother as the one who is *Apratigha*, invincible.

84. Chatterjee 1975.

***Rājadaṇḍa* Type:** In this type, the *rājadaṇḍa* is held by the king and is shown as a long stick with bulbous rounded ends.[85] As seen on the coins issued by Chandragupta I, the mint masters are portraying his role as, and also list the king as *Parama bhāgavata*—the most devout worshiper of Viṣṇu—while he holds the royal scepter, the *rājadaṇḍa*, in his left hand and offers oblations (*āhuti,* blessings/favors) with his right hand onto a *Yajña kuṇḍa.* Coins of this type were also issued both by and for Samudragupta I. These rare *Rājadaṇḍa* Type coins of Samudragupta I are considered to have been issued by a vassal king on behalf of Samudragupta I instead of a direct issue by a Gupta mint.

***Chakra* Standard Type (*Chakradhvaja* Type):** This coin type was only issued by Kāchagupta. On these coins, the king holds a *chakra*—a wheel-topped standard— in his left hand and offers oblations onto a *Yajña kuṇḍa* with his right hand. In Class II of these coins, we also find the *Garuḍa* standard (*Garuḍadhvaja*) on the obverse of the coins in addition to the *Chakradhvaja.*

Javelin Type, Archer Type, Battle-Axe Type, Swordsman Type, Horseman Type, Elephant-Rider Type, *Chhatra* Type, and *Aśvamedha* Type: The Javelin Type was mistakenly also called the "Standard Type" in the earlier literature, but in fact the object in the king's left hand is a javelin and not a standard.[86] On all such coins the kings are shown in an action mode, ready for battle. The all-powerful kings are depicted with their mastery over the weapons of war: the javelin, the Indian longbow, the battle-axe, the sword, the fearful elephants, and the fast war horse gave notice to the foes of the powerful Gupta kings and their military might. The Brāhmī legend on the Battle-Axe Type coins easily sums up the conquest/military stage in Samudragupta I's life at a time when he was consolidating the empire from Samudra-to-Samudra, sea-to-sea: *Kṛitāntaparaśur jayatyajita rājajetāt'jitaḥ* (Victorious is the conqueror of unconquered kings, himself invincible as The Battle-Axe of God of Death"). The *Aśvamedha* Type celebrates the important Vedic horse sacrifice—the *Aśvamedha*—one that only powerful kings could perform. In the Archer Type, Battle-Axe Type, *Chhatra* Type and the Swordsman Type, the kings perform the *Yajña* offering oblations at the *Yajña kuṇḍa* while portraying the king as always ready for war with his sword by his side.

Tiger-Slayer Type, Lion-Slayer Type, Elephant-Rider Lion-Slayer Type, Rhinoceros-Slayer Type, Horseman Lion-Slayer Type: These types show the king as all-powerful and brave, able to hunt down the mighty beasts of the jungle who were feared by all and most probably terrorized the local population. The Lion-Slayer Type broadcasts the message of Chandragupta II's and Kumāragupta I's conquests of the Gangetic plains, the home of the tigers, and the lions native to the land of the western Kṣatrapas, as well as Kumāragupta I's conquests of the eastern territories of Assam where the rhinoceroses roamed free.

Lyrist Type: The Lyrist Type shows Kings Samudragupta I and Kumāragupta I playing the stringed musical instrument, the *Vīṇā*—lyre—and the Couch Type of Chandragupta I and Chandragupta II, the kings relaxing on a couch at the zenith of their rule, enjoying the prosperity brought on by peace and stability in the empire.

85. Not to be confused with the Javelin Type coins which show a spearhead at one end.
86. See the discussion on this issue in Chapter 3 (pp. 80–93).

***Garuḍa* Type:** The *Garuḍa* Type celebrates Kumāragupta I's and Skandagupta's rule over the Chhattisgarh region. The *Garuḍa*, which was the royal emblem of the Gupta dynasty, and the biruda, the king's individual imperial title, form the design of these *repoussé* coins, emulating the local currency, which these gold coins eventually replaced in that region. Gupta mints did not shy away from copying the designs of a coin type or a coin style that was popular either within their own official issues or issued by neighboring kings. These familiar coin designs, as seen in the silver and lead coins of Chandragupta II, and the *Garuḍa* Type gold coins of Kumāragupta I, provided continuity through these coins struck with familiar designs for the local populace, leading to a wider acceptance of the currency. In gold coins, the most popular coin types copied by the mints are the Archer, *Aśvamedha*, *Chhatra*, Horseman, Lion-Slayer, and the Tiger-Slayer.

With the publication of this volume, our knowledge of the Gupta coins has advanced in the evolution of design, the economic status during the Guptas' reign, the iconographic development during the fourth–sixth centuries AD, and has helped fill in many of the missing pieces from the Golden Age of India. Even today, with the discovery of hundreds of gold, silver, copper, and lead coins that come to the market every year, I am amazed at the sheer number of new dies and new varieties that are discovered. I am very confident that the coming years we will continue to add to our knowledge and understanding of the events taking place in north India during the Gupta era.

1.3. Vikramāditya: the Legendary King

Before we proceed further into the study of the coins issued by each of the Gupta kings, and to better understand the attribution of coins to specific Gupta kings, it is very important to first and foremost understand the legend of the great Indian king Vikramāditya. If you were to ask ten scholars on Indian history this question—Who was King Vikramāditya?—you will get ten different answers. In most cases, they would all be partially correct. The reality is that in the time from the first century BC to the eighth century AD, there were many kings who adopted the title of *Vikramāditya.* Some were major kings who ruled over vast territories, whose domains encompassed vast tracts of the Indian subcontinent. Some were very minor kings who are mostly known from fleeting references in epigraphs or coins. The memories of all these kings synthesized to form a common legendary personality of a famous Indian king called Vikramāditya whose legends dictated that he was the *Parama bhāgavata*, the most devout devotee of Lord Vishnu, benevolent, powerful, valorous, charitable, wise, and just, and gifted in the arts, and above all, the bravest of all the kings, and one who was victorious.

The earliest use of the name Vikramāditya comes to us from the chief of the Malwa tribe of Ujjayinī who is assumed to have initiated the *Vikram Saṃvat* (Vikrama era) in 57 BC. However, this Malwa chief was not big or powerful enough to have been accredited solely with this legendary name. The actual use of the name "*Vikram Saṃvat*" is only first seen in the ninth century AD in the dated Dholpur Inscription of King Chandamahāsena of AD 841.[87] Prior to this we see the term used repeatedly by the Gupta kings who came to be one of the greatest dynasties of lndia—the Gupta dynasty—which had its own share of *Vikramādityas.* From the third through sixth centuries AD, multiple Gupta kings used and reused the titles *Śrī Vikramaḥ* and *Vikramādityaḥ,* leading to a consolidation of the historical facts into the legend of the mighty *Vikramāditya* who came to represent not one king but an entire dynasty.[88]

In fact, Goyal suggests that this time period should be called "The Age of the *Vikramādityas*."[89] Raychaudhuri rightly suggested that the *Vikramādityacharita* "sums up the historical and traditional achievements of a dynasty (the Guptas), rather than that of one single individual ruler."[90] The evolution of this legend is best seen through the coins issued by the Gupta kings which list their birudas on these gold, silver, copper, and lead coins that were widely distributed across northern, western, and central India and in use for over 250 years.

While Chandragupta II is considered to be the most famous of the Gupta kings to have used the titles *Śrī Vikramaḥ* and *Vikramādityaḥ*, this title was used by his grandfather, Chandragupta I, *prior to him, also by Skandagupta, and many of the later Gupta kings.* This fact was mostly ignored in the past by eminent scholars such as John Allan, A. S. Altekar, P. L. Gupta, and others, and led each of them to attribute erroneously *all* coins that featured the legend *Chandra* and *Śrī Vikramaḥ* to just one solitary king: Chandragupta II.

The following pages present coins issued by Chandragupta I, Samudragupta I, Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I, Skandagupta, Budhagupta, and a new later king known only as Vikramāditya from his coins, along with yet one more Chandragupta III, Chandragupta IV, and Vainyagupta, covering a period from AD 319 to after 507 where all of their coins featured biruda, *Śrī Vikramaḥ*, or versions thereof. Goyal points out that Samudragupta's title *Parākramanka*

87. Goyal 2005: 365–72.
88. Raychaudhuri 1997: 484.
89. Goyal 2005: 367.
90. I arrived at a similar conclusion, which I presented at the 2010 Conference on the Gupta Dynasty in Chandigarh.

also means *Vikramānka or Vikramāditya*.[91] In addition, the biruda *Vikramādityaḥ* was used by both Chandragupta II and Skandagupta on their coins. We also know of coins issued in the name of Samudragupta I and Kumāragupta I with the biruda *Śrī Vikramaḥ* on the reverse. Similarly, the literary works that followed in the coming centuries eulogizing the famous Gupta kings added to the confusion by continuing to refer to the different Gupta monarchs with a singular name, *Vikramādityaḥ*.

Figure 1.3. 1. Chandragupta I, Archer Type with biruda *Śrī Vikramaḥ*. PC 1077. 7.78 g, 20 mm. 2. Chandragupta II, *Chhatra* Type, with Brāhmī legend on reverse: *Vikramāditya*. PC 1121. 7.83 g, 19 mm. 3. Skandagupta, legend on reverse: *Vikramādityasya*. Altar Type. BM OR.9508. 1.82 g.

The *Kathāsaritsāgara* and the *Bharatkathāmanjarī* narrate the wide conquests of the famous King Vikramādityaḥ (which matches up quite well with the conquests of Samudragupta), while the *Devīchandraguptaṁ* of Viśaka and the legends found in *Vetālapañchaviṁśatī* and *Vikrama-kathā* use the title *Vikramāditya* for Chandragupta II. Similarly, in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the noble King Vikramāditya is described as the son of King Mahendrādityaḥ (refering to Skandagupta as son of Kumāragupta I).

The title *Śakahari* king Vikramāditya applies to Chandragupta II who started the wars against the Kṣatrapa king, and also to Kumāragupta I who finally vanquished the last Kṣatrapa king Rudrasiṁha III. Skandagupta was the *Vikramāditya* who was *supposed* to have vanquished the revolt from the local Nāgas of eastern Malwa and Śakas/Vākāṭakas who had rebelled against the Guptas after the death of Prabhāvatīgupta in AD 443.[92] Numismatic evidence shows us that, after the death of Kumāragupta I, Skandagupta issued silver coins using this *Vikramādityaḥ* title for himself on his *Garuḍa* Type silver coins, a term that is also used on his Supiā pillar inscription of GE 141. To add to the confusion of the legends, other later Gupta Kings such as Budhagupta also use this same biruda *Śrī Vikramaḥ*. From numismatic evidence we find that two additional later Vikramādityas follow: a Hūṇa king who gives himself the title of *Vikramādityaḥ* and issued his coins in the chaotic period after Budhagupta's death, and another king reusing the name Chandragupta (IV) known from his coins of the Archer Fire Altar (*Agnī kuṇḍa*) Type, who also adopts this same biruda *Śrī Vikramaḥ*. This repetitive use of the epitaphs and titles by successive Gupta kings helped

91. Goyal 2005: 242.
92. See pp. 6–9 for a discussion on the succession after Kumāragupta I.

to perpetuate this legend. It is clear that over the span of over 250 years, the exploits, conquests and victories, marital alliances, historical facts, and events of the Gupta kings all merged into the legend of the powerful King Vikramāditya. Even after the end of the Gupta Empire, the title of *Vikramāditya* was resurrected for Harṣavardhana (AD 606–647) as chronicled in the Kāśmīri text *Rājataraṅgiṅī.*

Over the last century, scholars have used the royal titles, birudas, and epitaphs to make their case of whether a king was able to issue coins. A detailed study of the titles, names, birudas, and epithets used for the Gupta kings shows us that they did not limit themselves to a singular title as is the general belief, but rather freely used the most appropriate title or epithet that suited the occasion.

While it is generally assumed that Samudragupta's biruda was *Parākramaḥ* and Chandragupta II's biruda was *Śrī Vikramaḥ*, Table 1.2 (pp. 28–30) will confirm that the Gupta kings were not limited to just these singular titles. Similarly, the greatest of the Gupta kings, Samudragupta I, is given all these royal designations: *Rājā, Mahārājā, Mahārājādhirāja,* as seen in inscriptions and coin legends. If *Rājā* and *Mahārājā* can be used for the mighty Samudragupta I, then why is it assumed that his grandfather, *Mahārājā* Śrīgupta was just a petty king who had used the title *Rajnña*? According to Altekar he "was too insignificant to issue any coinage," an assertion that is wrong.[93]

Another example of the importance of titles and birudas is the case of Rāmagupta. He was assumed by scholars to have never ruled as a Gupta king until Jain sculptures were discovered with inscriptions listing his title as a *Mahārājādhirāja*.[94] The epigraphical data from the Jain sculptures clearly confirms that he had assumed the title of a *Mahārājadhirāja,* a "Great King of Kings" and finally included him into the list of known Gupta kings. The identity of Kāchagupta has been debated for the past century with almost every major Gupta historian offering their opinions: Princep and Rapson ascribed these coins to Ghaṭotkacha; Vincent Smith kept changing his views; Allan, Fleet, and Raychaudhuri thought he was the same as Samudragupta; Bhanḍarkar thought he was same as Rāmagupta but changed his view later; Banerjea and P. L. Gupta thought he was a brother of Samudragupta.[95] The reality is that all of these debates were strictly conjecture. None of the proposed attributions was based on evidence. This question of the identity of this king is addressed later in the book where the coins of Rāmagupta-Kāchagupta are discussed to prove that both of them were one and the same person.

The tables in the following pages attempt to summarize the titles, birudas, and epithets as used for/by the Gupta kings on inscriptions, seals and sealings, coins, and copper plates. The tables will show that so many of the arguments proposed over the years can be struck down just by a simple review of the titles, birudas, and epithets listed within. The problem with assuming that a single title applied to a single king has led many scholars and historians to errant conclusions. For example, the use of *Sarvarājochchhettā* as an epithet (assumed by scholars and historians to have been only used by Samudragupta) seemed to be the reason for scholars to argue that Kācha coins should be attributed to Samudragupta instead to the king Kāchagupta. However, as shown in the biruda table, this Epithet was not exclusive to just Samudragupta but was also used for Chandragupta II in the Puṇe copper plates of Prabhāvatīgupta where on line 5 she uses this title to refer to her father.[96] Altekar argued that the Puṇe plates were

93. Altekar 1957: 2.
94. Gai 1968/69: 250–51.
95. Joshi 1992.
96. Mirashi 1963: 7.

not "official" Gupta records and hence they should be rejected, a weak argument as official Vākāṭakas inscriptions should be considered as reliable as official Gupta inscriptions, especially one written by Chandragupta II's own daughter Prabhāvatīgupta.[97]

In William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet,* Juliet's line "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet" encapsulates perfectly what the legend of the title *Vikramāditya* meant to the common person in ancient India. It was not just a name but also a title that immediately signified a mighty king who was brilliant, courageous, faithful and devout, fearless, and powerful, and above all a statesman who united the land.

97. Altekar 1957: 80–87. Dandekar, Abhijit, Suken Shah, Shrikant Ganvir, Virag Sontakke, and Shantanu Vaidya 2020, "Second Sealing of the Vākāṭaka Queen Prabhāvatīgupta from Nagardhan Excavation," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 80: 27–30. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48673794.

1.4. Birudas, Titles, and Epithets Used by Gupta Kings

King	Titles/Birudas/Ephithets	Reference
Śrigupta	Mahārāja	Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta, line 28; Bilsad stone pillar inscription of Kumāragupta: Year 96, line 3
	Rajnña	Sārnāth Haritī inscription
	Śrī	All inscriptions
Ghaṭotkacha	Adhiārāja	Puṇe/Rithpur inscriptions of Prabhāvatiguptā; Supia inscription of Skandagupta.
	Mahārāja	Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta, line 28; Bilsad stone pillar inscription of Kumāragupta: Year 96, line 3
Chandragupta I	Mahārājādhirāja	Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta, line 28
	Paramabhāgvata	*Rājadaṇḍa* Type coins
	Śrīvikramaḥ	Archer Type coins
Samudragupta I	Apratirathaḥ	Archer Type
	Aprativāryavīryaḥ	*Aśvamedha* Type coins
	Aśvamedha-parākramaḥ	*Aśvamedha* Type coins
	Kṛitāntaparaśuḥ	Battle-Axe Type coins
	Kṛitāntaparaśuḥ	Mathurā stone inscription of CG II, line 3
	Mahārājādhi[rāja]	Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta, line 29
	Parākrama	Sunet sealing; Rapson, 1901
	Parākramaḥ	Javelin Type coins
	Parākramāṅka	Kṛishṇa-Charitam, Canto I
	Paramabhāgvata	Kṛishṇa-Charitam, Canto I
	Rājā	Tiger-Slayer Type coins
	Rājādhirājaḥ/Rājādhirāja	*Aśvamedha* Type, Lyrist Type coins
	Sarvvarajochchhettā	Bilsad stone pillar inscription of Kumaragupta, line 1
	Bhattāraka mahārājadhirāja	Mathurā stone inscription of CG II, line 1
	Śrī Vikramaḥ	Javelin Type coins
	Vikramāṅka	Kṛishṇa-Charitam, Canto I
	Vyāghra-parākramaḥ	Tiger-Slayer Type coins
Rāmagupta - Kāchagupta	Mahārājādhirāja	Durjanpur inscriptions
	Sarvvarajochchhettā	*Chakradhvaja* Type coins
Chandragupta II	Ajitavikramaḥ	Horseman Type coins
	Chakravikramaḥ	
	Devagupta	Chammak plates of Pravarasena, line 15
	Devarāja	Sānchī inscription of CG II, line 7
	Kumāra	Nālandā copper plate inscription of Samudragupta: Year 5, line 12
	Mahārājādhi	Udayagirī inscription, line 1; Fleet, p. 25
	Mahārājādhirāja	Gadhwa stone inscription of CG II, line 1
	Narendrachandra	Lion-Slayer Type coins
	Paramabhāgvata	Gadhwa stone inscription of CG II, lines 1 and 10
	Paramabhattāraka	Udayagirī inscription, line 1
	Sarvarājochchhetta	Puṇe plates of Prabhāvatiguptā, line 5; Riddhapur plates of Prabhāvatiguptā, line 5

Table 1.2. Birudas, titles, and epithets used by Gupta kings

Table 1.2 (cont'd)

King	Titles/Birudas/Ephithets	Reference
Chandragupta II (cont'd)	Siṁhavikramaḥ	Lion-Slayer Type coins
	Srirajitavikrama	Horseman Type coins
	Śrīvikramaḥ	Archer Type coins
	Śrīmaṁvikramaḥ	Archer Type coins, Variety K
	Śrīvikrottamaḥ	Archer Type coins, Variety L
	Vikramādityaḥ	*Chhatra* Type coins; Supia inscription of Skandagupta, line 3
	Vikramādityasya	Couch Type coins
	Vikramāṅka	Silver Type coins
Ghatoṭkachagupta	Rājārājā	Vākāṭaka Ramtek Prabhavati memorial inscription
	Kramāditya	Archer Type coins
	Śrī	Basarh sealing of Ghaṭotkachagupta
Kumāragupta I	Ajitamahendraḥ	Horseman Type coins
	Apratighaḥ	*Apratigha* Type coins
	Kumaraguptodhirāja	Tiger-Slayer Type coins
	Mahārāja	Mankuwar inscription, line 1
	Mahārājādhirāja	Gadhwa stone inscription of KG I, line 1; Bilsad stone pillar inscription of Kumāragupta: Year 96, line 6
	Mahendrādityaḥ	Supia inscription of Skandagupta, line 4
	Mahendrakumarah	Kārtikeya Type coins
	Paramabhāgvata	Gadhwa stone inscription of KG I, line 1
	Siṁhamahendraḥ, Sinhamahendraḥ	Lion-Slayer Type coins
	Śiṁhanihantā Mahendragajah	Elephant-Rider|Lion-Slayer Type coins
	Śrī-aśvamedhamahendra	*Aśvamedha* Type coins
	Śrī-mahendra-khaḍga	Rhinocerous-Slayer Type coins
	Śrīmahendrādityaḥ	*Garuḍa* Type coins
	Śrīmahendragajaḥ	Elephant-Rider Type coins
	Śrīmahendraḥ	Archer Type coins
	Śrīmahendrasiṁhaḥ	Lion-Slayer Type coins
	Śrīmaṁ vyāghrabalaparākramaḥ	Tiger-Slayer Type coins
	Śrīvikramaḥ	Archer Type coins
Skandagupta	Chakravartin	Supia pillar inscription of the time of Skandagupta: Year 141, lines 4–5; Bhandarkar, p. 319
	Devarāja	*Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*
	Kramāditya	Archer Type coins
	Mahārājādhi[rāja]	Bihar stone pillar inscription, line 25; Fleet 1885, p. 67
	Paramabhāgvato	Bihar stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta, line 22
	Paramabhattāraka	Indore copper plate inscription of Skandagupta: Year 146, line 3
	Vikramādityaḥ	Altar Type coin
Jayagupta	Śrī Vikramaḥ	Archer Type coin
Purugupta	Mahārājādhirāja	Bhitari seal, line 6
Chandragupta III	Śrī Vikramaḥ	Archer Type coins
Narasiṁhagupta I	Bālādityaḥ, (Valaditya), Śrī Bālādityaḥ	Archer Type coins
	Mahārājādhirāja	Bhitari seal, line 7
	Pramabhāgvata	Nalanda clay seal of Narasimhagupta, lines 7–8

Table 1.2 (cont'd)

King	Titles/Birudas/Ephithets	Reference
Chandragupta IV	Śrī Vikramaḥ	Archer Type coins
Kumāragupta II	Kramājita	Archer Type coins
	no title listed on inscription	Sarnath stone inscription, GE 154
Budhagupta	Śrī Vikramaḥ	Archer Type coins
	Mahārājādhirāja	Nalanda seal of Budhagupta, line 8
	Paramabhāgavato	Nalanda seal of Budhagupta, line 8
Bhānugupta	Śrī	Eraṇ stone pillar inscripton, GE 191
Prakāśaditya	Śri Prakāśa	Archer Type coins
	Śri Prakāśaditya	Horseman|Lion-Slayer Type coins
Vikramādityaḥ	Śrī Vikramaḥ, Vikramādityaḥ	Archer Type coins
Parākramadityaḥ	Parākramadityaḥ	Archer Type coins
Vainyagupta	Śrī Dvādaśādityaḥ	Archer Type coins
	Paramabhāgavata	Nalanda sealing of Vainyagupta
	Mahārājā	Gunaighar copper-plate inscription, GE 188
	Mahārājādhirāja	Nalanda sealing of Vainyagupta
Narasiṁhagupta II	Bālādityaḥ	Archer Type coins
Kumāragupta III	Mahārājādhirāja	Bhitari seal, line 8; Nalanda seal, line 8; Archer Type coins
	Paramabhāgavato	Nalanda clay seal, line 8; Archer Type coins
Viṣṇugupta	Śrī Chandraditya	Archer Type coins
	Mahārājādhirāja	Nalanda clay seal of Viṣṇugupta
	Paramadaivata, Paramabhattaraka	Damodarpur copper plate inscription of Viṣṇugupta

THIS COIN SHOWS a powerful and majestic King Chandragupta I, *Vikramādityaḥ*, standing next to his Queen Kumaradevī. The King and Queen Type coin design was issued by each of the Gupta kings to honor and commemorate the marriage of the first Gupta monarch, Chandragupta, to the Lichchhavi princess. This marriage alliance between the Guptas and Lichchhavis provided the impetus for the start and expansion of the Gupta Empire. This specific coin was issued by Chandragupta II at the beginning of the fifth century AD. Coin **447**.

ON THIS COIN ISSUED AROUND AD 383, the goddess Lakṣmī is shown seated on a lotus flower. She holds a lotus flower in her left hand and the royal diadem in her right. This is a coin issued by Chandragupta II , after he had captured the throne. Prior to this period, the design of Goddess Lakṣmī had not yet fully developed, and she was only standing or seated on a throne. It is only around end of the fourth century AD when her design was codified in Hindu *Śilpa Śāstras* and from then on she was always shown seated on a lotus flower on coin designs and sculptures. PC, 1115.

2. Evolution of the Design Elements of Gupta Coinage

Evolution of iconography during the Gupta era was a synthesis of Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu design elements and symbols, which formed an expansive narrative of the religious thought and themes emerging across the ever expanding territories of the Gupta Empire. The expansion of trade via the land and sea trade routes linked Asia/India to the Roman Empire via the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The constant flow of traders, goods, and ideas moving across the land and sea trade routes continued to influence this evolution of iconography. Before we study the coinage, it is important to consider the iconography and its meaning in the context of Gupta numismatics.

Figure 2.1. Goddess Lakṣmī holds *Akṣāmālā* with her right hand.

2.1. Akṣāmālā

A rosary made of beads or lotus seeds. Two good examples of this *Kamalākshamālā* are seen on the reverse of the coins of the Chandragupta II Horseman Type, Class II, Variety A.1 *Kamalākshamālā* (Fig. 2.1).

2.2. Chakra

The word *chakra* in Sanskrit means "wheel," "circle," or "cycle." In religious context the *chakra* is the emblem of Lord Viṣṇu, and Robert Beer succinctly describes the representation of the *chakra* below:

> The wheel is an early Indian solar symbol of sovereignty, protection, and creation. As a solar symbol it first appears on clay seals unearthed from the Harappan civilization of the Indus valley (circa 2500 BCE). The wheel or *chakra* is the main attribute of the Vedic god of preservation, Viṣṇu, whose fiery six-spoked *Sudarshan chakra*

> or discus represents the wheel of the phenomenal universe. The wheel represents motion, continuity, and change, forever turning onwards like the circling sphere of the heavens. As a weapon the rimless *chakra* had six, eight, ten, twelve, or eighteen sharply pointed blades, and could be hurled like a discus or swung upon a rope.[1]

The Sanskrit term *chakravartin* is usually translated as "universal monarch" or "emperor," and literally means "wheel-turner," or "a wheel that travels everywhere without obstruction." The prefix "*chakra*" has various interpretations. It can refer either to the fiery wheel of the sun or to the sun god's chariot with its two wheels of heaven and earth. As an emblem of Viṣṇu, the *chakra* is his discus, and it appears as an auspicious mark on the palms and soles of divine beings. As a unit of measure, the *chakra* refers to the whole of a land's surface area, from coast to coast. The turning of the wheel symbolizes both secular and religious authority. It denotes movement, extension, victory, change, and the formation of a new ethical and moral order.[2] The *Vāmana Purāna* describes the *Sudarśhan chakra* with twelve spokes (*Dvādśhāra*) and six naves (*Shaṇnābhi*), representing the twelve gods: *Agnī, Soma, Mitra, Varuṇa, Śachipati* (*Indra*), *Indrāgni, Vāyu, Viśvedeva, Prajāpati*, and *Dhanvantari.*[3]

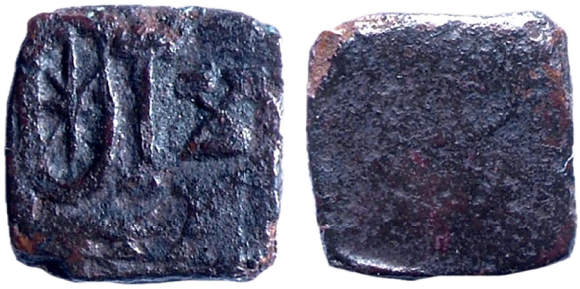


Figure 2.2. 8-spoke *chakra.* Rāmagupta. BM 1990,0513.5.

Figure 2.3. 16-spoke *chakra.* Kumāragupta I. GE 110 (AD 429). Lead. PC, 3103.

Figure 2.4. Skandagupta. 6-spoke *Sudarshan chakra,* and right-turning *Śaṅkha.* Lead. PC, 3527.

Figure 2.5. Viṣṇu's *chakra* held by *Garuḍa*. Kumāragupta I. *Garuḍa* Type. 1.3 g, 17 mm. PC, 1200.

The *chakra* appears on Gupta gold coins with six spokes and with multiple spokes on the lead and copper coins of Kumāragupta and Skandagupta. We do not find it on the silver coinage. On gold coins, it first appears on those struck by Kāchagupta where the king is shown holding a six-spoke *chakra*-topped scepter or *Chakradhvaja*, *Garuḍa* Type coins of Kumāragupta I, and on Chandragupta II Archer Type coins. The king is also shown as a *Chakravartin* on the *Chakravikramaḥ* Type coins—these are assumed to be issued by Chandragupta II, but it is possible that these may

2. Beer 2003.
3. Agarwala 1964: 170.

have been actually issued by his grandfather Chandragupta I.[4] On the *Garuḍa* Type *repoussé* gold coins issued for Kumāragupta I, the *Garuḍa* holds a *chakra* in his right hand and a *śankh* (conch shell) in his left hand (Fig. 2.5).

During Gupta times, the *Chakradhvaja*—the *chakra*-topped pillar standard (Fig. 2.6)—was a common sight in the vicinity of the Vaiṣṇavite temples and served as a heraldic emblem. These were no doubt copied from the Buddhist wheel-topped pillars set up during the Mauryan period, which were themselves copied from prototypes in the Vedic period. "The spoked disk by itself, and in conjunction with a personified *chakra* became an equally important insignia of the deity."[5]

Figure 2.6. Kāchagupta. *Chakradhvaja* Type. 6-spoke / 24 rays.

Figure 2.7. Vaiṣṇavi—24 spokes. Berlin Museum.

Figure 2.8. Clay sealing with *chakra*, Legend: *Kumaraditya*, NM acc. no. 92-35-6.

Figure 2.9. *Chakra* seal image with double seal impressions. Yopādhyasya. IMK, acc. no. 6202/A18553.

Figure 2.10. Flaming *chakra* with lion on terracotta seal of Pashupati Simha. NM.*

* This seal of Pashupati Simha, a high governmental officer of the Gupta period, c. AD 350–450, was discovered at Nālandā. It is divided into two registers. The upper register shows a magnificent roaring lion, seated in profile. The sun and moon are on either side of his head. To the left is a flaming *chakra*, flanked by two *Śaṅkha* shells. The second register features a long Brāhmī inscription: "*Vijita-arati-gansya Nyayavato Raja-wrutti-nipunasya Swaguna-abharanasya Shri Pashupati Simhasya Laksh-idam*"
वजितिारतगिणस्य न्यायवतो राजवृत्तनिपुिणस्य स्वगुणाभरणस्य श्री पशुपतसिहिस्य लक्ष्दिं
("This is the seal of the illustrious Pashupati Simha, whose qualities are his ornaments, who is adept at serving the King, is just and has won over his enemies"). Image courtesy of Shailendra Bhandare.

4. The low weight of 7.56 g and style of king on the obverse leaves open the possibility that the *Chakravikramaḥ* Type could have been issued by Chandragupta I. The reverse of these coins is a match to the *Chhatra* Type coin 1118, and that would suggest it is a Chandragupta II issue.

5. Agarwala 1964: 17.

The *chakra* as a symbol of faith was also used on official seals. The seal impression was applied to wet clay as the official signature for documents sealed with a string and a clay sealing. In many cases, multiple seals were applied to the lump of clay to confirm that multiple officials sanctioned the document or edict (Fig. 2.9).

By the fourth century AD, the iconography of the *chakra* in Buddhist terms represented the wheel of *dharma,* while in the Surya context it referred to the wheel of the sun transformed into a temple, the wheel of radiance that surrounds a deity (*prabhāchakra* or *prabhāmandala*), the small ornamental wheel behind the head of a deity (*śiraśchakra*; see Samudragupta Archer Type CL 1, Var. A.1) and the wheel personified as a person—*chakrapuruṣa* (coin **276**). In Viṣṇu's iconography, the *chakra* is a weapon held in his hand (*sudarśana*) (Figs. 2.8–9); in Vaiṣṇavite temples, a metallic *chakra* surmounted on a shaft or the top finial of the temple structure is considered a representative deity. In the Hindu pantheon, the *chakra* is also seen as a weapon of Durgā, Bhairava, Gaṇapatī, Śarabha, and Devī. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vairochana, a *dhyāni*-Buddha carries a *chakra*, while in Jainism, the *chakra* forms an important part of the iconography. The *Uttara-Kāmika* describes Śiva presenting the *chakra* to Viṣṇu as narrated in the *Śiva-Purāṇas*.

During the Gupta era, the iconography of the *chakra* was evolving. There seems to be no standardization of the number of spokes; rather, it seems that its symbolic meaning was directly tied to the context of its placement. On Gupta coins, we find the *chakra* on copper coins of Rāmagupta and gold coins of Kāchagupta, lead coins of Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, as well as on the obverse of the gold coins of Chandragupta II.

Figure 2.11. Viṣṇu. 16-spoke *chakra* and *śrivatsa* on chest. Gupta era. Mathurā, UP. NYMMA 1987.142.293.

Figure 2.12. Viṣṇu. 18-spoke *chakra* and *śrivatsa* on chest. Gupta era. Mathurā, UP. Berlin Museum 45.173.

2.3. Crescent and the Chandradhvaja

Another important feature to note here is the introduction of a crescent and the crescent standard (an attribute of Śiva), which is prominently visible on coins of the King and Queen Type of Chandragupta I (Fig. 2.13, obv.), as well as the Tiger-Slayer Type and Battle-Axe Types of Samudragupta I (Fig. 2.14 obv.). This is a carryover from Kuṣāṇa coins and Kuṣāṇo-Sasanian kings like Hormizd I. After Samudragupta, this crescent-topped standard completely disappeared from coins struck by Chandragupta II and then reappears on the Tiger-Slayer Type coins of Kumāragupta I. The crescent symbol, however, continued to be featured on coins issued by each of the successive kings. By the time of Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, we see the trident (*triśūla*) and the bull (*nandī*) also make their appearance on silver, copper, and lead coins, confirming their veneration of the Śaivite faith as well. In the *sadharnasiva* depiction of Lord Śiva, he is shown with two hands, three eyes, and a javelin or a trident, a design that undoubtedly influenced early Gupta coins.[6]

Figure 2.13. King and Queen Type of Samudragupta. PC. 7.8 g. Class I, Var. A.4.

Figure 2.14. Battle-Axe Type, Class II, Var. B coin of Samudragupta. PC, 1050. 7.36 g.

On the coin issued by Hormizd I, there are two tridents (*triśūla*) shown on the obverse (Fig. 2.18). In front of the king and to his proper right, the second trident shown has a distinct crescent-topped design. This crescent-topped trident device is seen commonly on the Sasanian coins from that time.[7]

Figure 2.15. Kanishka I. Triton VIII-272. 7.99 g, 20 mm. Crescent above head of goddess. AD 127–151.

Figure 2.16. Huvishka with spear, goddess Nanā on lion, crescent above. BM 1888,1208.555. 7.89 g, 20 mm. AD 151–190.

Coins of Kuṣāṇo-Sasanian King Hormizd I (AD 265–295) show a crescent above the trident (*triśūla*) standard. On Kanishka II's reverse, the goddess wears a double crescent crown.

6. Gupte 1972: 60.
7. See another version of the crescent and *triśūla* standard shown on the coins of the Hūṇā kings of Kāśmīr, pp. 491–93.

Figure 2.17. Kanishka II. Goddess Ardokṣo with a dual crescent crown. NM. AD 230–247.

Figure 2.18. Hormizd I with *Triśūla-Crescent* standard. Triton XIV-548. 7.86 g, 30 mm. AD 270–300.

Chhabra also pointed to the presence of the crescent standard on these early Gupta coins as an indication that the Gupta kings may have been *Chandravamśa Kṣatriya* who traced their origins from the moon or *Soma* or *Chandra.*[8] The Gupta royal inscriptions do not list any caste affiliations for the Gupta kings, however on the coins of the Archer|Quiver Type (coin **25**, Fig. 2.19 obv.), we can see the king with the *yajñopavītam,* the sacred thread across his chest as it flows from over the left shoulder. This *Upanayana* thread ceremony was mostly performed within the Brāhmīn and the Kṣatriya castes and is considered a rite of passage for the start of the education process for the young student at the feet of his guru.[9] This sacred thread can be seen draped across the left shoulder of the King Chandragupta I in the coin below. It is important to note here that this *yajñopavītam* thread is not seen on any coins struck after Chandragupta I.

The use of the crescent symbol by itself as seen on the Gupta coins (other than as a standard or *dhvaja)* was to convey a sense of permanence of the power of a king or a dynasty. The use of the term *Āchandratārakam* in grants and charters issued in ancient India was quite common and signified the permanence of the king or dynasty to last as long as the sun, the moon, and the stars.[10] The crescent is also one of the main attributes of Śiva and is always seen placed on his head as a crown (*Chandraśekara*). Interestingly, the sun symbol seldom appears on the Gupta coins and is mostly seen on coins struck by/in affiliated regions, such as the heavy weight Chandragupta II Archer Type gold coins which have a sun with rays, as well as the *Garuḍa* Type coins of Kumāragupta I which show the crescent moon as well as the sun, which was in circulation in the Dakṣiṇa Kosala region. The sun and the crescent are also seen on the silver and lead coins from the western regions where the Guptas replaced the local currency with their own, a design that was copied from Kṣatrapa coinage. The crescent moon symbol was used throughout the span of the Gupta Dynasty on gold, silver, copper, and lead coins. The star cluster of dots is seen mostly on the silver coins struck in the western regions.

The fact that the Guptas were devout Vaiṣṇavite is clear as they considered themselves as *Paramabhāgavata,* the most devout devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. Their use of birudas ending with *ādityaḥ* was a direct homage to Lord Viṣṇu, as *ādityaḥ* itself is another one of Viṣṇu's names. In his paper "Coin Legends of Gupta Emperors and *Vishnushasaranāma*" (*JNSI* IX), Chhabra detailed the similarities between the ancient Indian *stotra*—the *Vishnushasaranāma* seemed to have provided the basis and inspiration for the coin legends, the names of the Gupta kings, and their titles. The name "Gupta" itself was another one of the thousand names used for Viṣṇu, derived from *guhya*

8. Chhabra 1981: xxii.
9. Manu 2: 44.
10. Chinmulgund 1947: 34–35.

Figure 2.19. Chandragupta I, Archer-Quiver Type showing the *yajñopavītam* tied across the king's left shoulder. PC, 1074. 7.86 g, 20 mm.

(secret), *Gabhira* (profound), and *Gahana* (mysterious), leading to the use of the term "Gupta" as a metaphor for "hidden, alluding to the "impervious nature of the godhead," which we find echoed in the opening sentences of the second section of the *Tattiriya Upānishads* as well in the Gita. The term *guhāyām* is best explained by ŚrīAurobindo as:

> "…[meaning] both the individual and the cosmic Nature. The Divine is concealed in the secret heart of all things and all beings." The phrase is an allusion to the constant Vedic and Upanishadic expression *Hṛdayeguhāyām, nihitaṃguhāyām, gūdhamguhāyām* ("hidden in the secret cavern of the heart"). What is meant, in the individual nature, is the secret psychic center which is covered up by egoistic emotion, feeling and desire.

The imagery on coins, sculptures, and murals incorporated elements from all the Hindu sects prevalent during that time. The empire encompassed the entire northern and central India, and the designs on coins paid homage to the local religious movements active during that time and in local regions.

2.4. Fire Altar

The *Yajña kuṇḍa* or the *Havan kuṇḍa* is an integral part of the Hindu religious ceremony, which involves the offering of oblations onto a sacrificial fire: a *yajña* ritual. The *Upanishads* prescribed the *yajña* rituals, and Vedic texts like the *Śathpatha Brāhamana,* the *Sulbasutras*, and the *Rigveda,* all talk of the fire altar as part of daily life. Kālidāsa, who is considered a contemporary of Chandragupta II, mentions that the King Vikramāditya offered oblations on to the holy fires as per the scriptural injunctions.[11]

Figure 2.20. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 250). Roma 26-766. Silver. 3.90 g, 21 mm.

Figure 2.21. Ardaxšīr I (AD 223/4–240). Tetradrachm. Billon. 13.11 g, 24.97 mm.

Figure 2.22. Vasudeva I, Kuṣāṇa (AD 190–230).

Figure 2.23. Chandragupta II, *Chhatra* Type. PC, 1119.

Figure 2.24. Lapis lazuli stone seal of Śrīgupta with a vedic stepped *Yajña kuṇḍa*. Fourth c. AD. PC.

The depiction of the fire altar on the coins was not exclusive to the Indian subcontinent. On the Chhatra Type coin of Chandragupta II, the king is shown offering oblations onto a fire altar prior to embarking on a journey or a battle. He is shown standing under a royal umbrella carried by an attendant, positioned behind the king.[12] Roman style (Fig. 2.20), Sasanian/Iranian style (Fig. 2.21), and Kuṣāṇa style (Fig. 2.22) show the various designs used to depict the *Yajña kuṇḍa* on Gupta coinage: the tall Kuṣāṇa style to the short Roman style receptacles in various shapes as seen on later Gupta coinage (Skandagupta silver Altar Type, Chandragupta IV Altar Type gold coins), as well as a stepped style is seen on the blue lapis lazuli stone seal of Śrīgupta (Fig. 2.24).

11. Kar 1950: 49.

12. The shape of the *Yajña kuṇḍa* changes from a tall device to a shorter receptacle on coins of the *Chhatra* Type of Chandragupta II.

2.5. Garuḍa and Garuḍadhvaja

In Hindu mythology, the *Garuḍa* is an eagle-humanoid creature that serves as the mount for Lord Viṣṇu and was the sworn enemy of the snakes (*Nāgas*). As the Gupta kings were Vaiṣṇavite, their royal seal was the *Garuḍa*. On gold coins, the king and the *Garuḍa* are shown with the *Garuḍa* mostly to the proper right of the king. The *Garuḍa* perched on a pillar or a stand is the *Garuḍadhvaja.* It is always shown facing forward; however, on one variety of Samudragupta Javelin Type (coin **128**), the *Garuḍa* is shown looking at the king.

Figure 2.25. *Garuḍadhvaja* on left of king. Samudragupta I. BM 1853,0301.375.

Figure 2.26. *Garuḍadhvaja* carried by a horseman. Bharhut, MP. Second c. BC.

Figure 2.27. *Garuḍa* with snakes. Terracotta. Gupta period. Mathurā, UP.

2.6. Kalaśa

Also *Pūrṇa-Kalaśa*, *Pūrṇa-Kumbha*, *Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa*, is a metal pot to hold water used in Hindu rituals. In Hinduism, the earth emerged out of the primeval water. This *Kalaśa* is seen on the copper coins of Rāmagupta and Chandragupta II.

Figure 2.28. *Pūrṇa-Kalaśa* on copper coin of Chandragupta II. Legend "*Chandra*." 0.75 g, 12 mm. RP Collection.

2.7. Evolution of the design of Lakṣmī prior to the Gupta Age

Prior to the third c. AD, Lakṣmī is shown depicted mostly either seated on a throne, or in the form of Gajalakṣmī, standing on a lotus flower with two elephants on either side of her showering her with water. Her imagery developed slowly over the prior four centuries, and the earliest silver Karshapana coins from the fourth–third c. BC show her seated on a throne. Around the first c. BC, she is shown as a goddess standing on a blooming lotus flower.

We see similar imagery developing in sculptures, from the Bharhut red sandstone sculptures dated to mid-third c. BC to terracottas from Kauśāmbī dated to first c. BC.

Figure 2.29. Seated goddess. Silver Karshapana punchmark coin. Fourth–third c. BC. AJ Collection.

Figure 2.30. Goddess standing on lotus flower. Kuninda, silver. First c. BC. PC.

Figure 2.31. Gajalakṣmī, Kauśāmbī, UP. First c. BC. Shri Lakṣmī lustrated by elephants (Gaja-Lakṣmī). India, Uttar Pradesh, Kauśāmbī, First c. BC. Terracotta 14.61 × 8.89 × 1.59 cm. LACMA M.85.62.

2.8. Evolution of the Design of Lakṣmī during the Gupta Age

Also referred to as "*Śrī*," Lakṣmī is the Hindu goddess of wealth, prosperity, and fortune. She is the consort of Viṣṇu and is mostly shown sitting or standing on a lotus flower, typically holding either one or two lotus flowers in her hands. The lotus flower is a symbol of purity and divinity. In Hindu mythology, Lord Brahmā is the god of creation, and she is said to have been born from the golden lotus. The lotus flower is usually shown with either eight or sixteen petals. On Gupta gold coins, we see a slow evolution of the design elements. This design transformation begins during the Kuṣāṇa era with a Persian goddess Ardokṣo shown seated on a throne holding a cornucopia in her left hand (goat horn overflowing with fruits, a symbol of abundance) and a *Pāśa* in her right hand. This design becomes standardized for a goddess, and we see such a design on both sculptures and gold coins from that time. At the start of Gupta era, the first gold coins struck by Chandragupta I use this same Kuṣāṇa coins design as their prototype and feature a goddess seated on throne holding a cornucopia and a diadem.[13] Unlike Kuṣāṇa who were devout Shaivites, Chandragupta I considered himself a *Paramabhāgavata* (most devout follower of Viṣṇu). Therefore, this goddess on his coins is an early representation of Lakṣmī, even though the attributes of Lakṣmī had not yet been fully developed in the early fourth century AD.

Figure 2.32. Lakṣmī seated on a lotus flower. Chandragupta II, fourth c. AD.

Once Samudragupta I comes to power during the mid-fourth century AD, his early years centered around the militaristic phase, where he focused on consolidating and expanding his empire. It was during this time that he also initiated the royal patronage of brāhmaṇical Vedic rituals. On his Battle-Axe Type coins from this period, we see the early signs of this royal patronage translate into new designs of how to depict Goddess Lakṣmī more in line with the Brahmanical attributes for the consort of Viṣṇu. Her primary attributes are derived from the epithets used in the ancient stotra and sutras of Hinduism is the Lotus: *Padmā, Kamalā, Padmapriyā, Padmamālādhāra Devī*, etc. This attribute is picked up by the mint craftsmen who begin the process of including the lotus into the new design of a seated goddess on these gold coins. The transformation of the Goddess seated on a throne fully evolves into a design distinctly depicting the Goddess Lakṣmī seated on a lotus. This design transformation started in the mid-fourth century AD and was culminated with a codified design by end of the fourth century, all during reign and patronage of the Gupta kings.

13. A few rare coins of Kuṣāṇa king Huvishka are known with Viṣṇu on the reverse; however, Kuṣāṇa coins do not refer to Lakṣmī or a goddess with her attributes. Kuṣāṇa kings did issue a large range of coins featuring Śiva (Oesho), and on a rare coin of Huvishka, Śiva and his consort Uma are shown on the reverse. The diadem continues to be used as a feature on early Gupta coins in to the reign of Samudragupta I and eventually becomes a *Pāśa* on later Gupta coins.

A B C D E

Figure 2.33. Transformation of the design of the goddess Ardokṣo on a throne to the goddess Lakṣmī seated on a lotus during the fourth century AD.

A. Kuṣāṇa–Vashiska (AD 247–267): Goddess Ardokṣo seated on throne and holding a cornucopia in her left hand. Her feet rest on a mat shown as a circle with dots. BM 1921,0306.12. 12.8 g, 24 mm.

B. Chandragupta I (AD 319–343): Archer|Quiver Type (coin **25**). The device shown in her left hand has changed from a cornucopia to be more like a lateral view of a lotus seed pod, *bījakoṣā* (seed vessel of a lotus flower).[14]

C. Samudragupta (AD 344–378): Battle-Axe Type (coin **202**). The goddess holds a *bījakoṣā* (or cornucopia) and her feet rest on a *bījakoṣā* as the lotus petals surround it, as an attribute of Adi-Lakṣmī. In this initial design she is also shown holding a bag of coins in her right hand as the earlierst imagery of *Dhana-Lakṣmī*.[15]

D. Reverse of Samudragupta: Battle-Axe Type, Class II. The goddess holds a lotus flower instead of a *bījakoṣā* and her feet rest on a lotus flower in full bloom. However, here she still sits on a throne. In her right hand, she is shown either dropping coins with her right hand or holding a bag of coins, imagery pointing to a combination of *Rājya-Lakṣmī* and *Dhana-Lakṣmī.* Baldwins XXV-349.

E. Chandragupta II (AD 383-412): Ascent to power. The goddess Lakṣmī sits on a lotus flower in a *Padmāsanā* pose, with a halo, and holding a lotus flower in her left hand and the royal diadem/ *Pāśa* in her right hand. Coin **291**, 7.74 g.

The Class II Var. A.3, Band III Battle-Axe coins were struck late in Samudragupta's reign, and by the time Chandragupta II came to power the reverse design of the Goddess had completed its transformation to Lakṣmī seated on a lotus flower in a *Padmāsanā* pose.

This transformation took almost 64 years from the start of the coins under Chandragupta I to the ascent of Chandragupta II to power in AD 383 after he assassinated Rāmagupta-Kāchagupta. As further proof of this evolution we see the initial coins struck by Kāchagupta (coin F, struck at a regional mint) which depicts the goddess as holding a simple flower and a cornucopia, *while* coin G below, struck at the royal mint after Kāchagupta takes the Gupta throne, she is now shown holding a lotus flower and a *bījakoṣā.* These two coins (F and G) are very important markers in the timeline to date these events because it shows that the royal mint was starting to make the transformation in the designs ahead of the regional mints. We now know that Rāmagupta was issuing the early gold coins in Vidiśā with the biruda *Kācha*. After taking the throne in ca. AD 378–379, his new coins issued by the royal mint now feature a *Garuḍadhvaja* (royal Gupta emblem signifying control of the throne) added to the obverse for the very first time. It is these coins (G) which for the first time show a full lotus flower, which then eventually transforms into a full Lotus design (H) on coins issued by Chandragupta II.

14. Also, see the evolution of this device into possibly *a Pāśa,* p. 56.

15. This reverse design also helps date this specific Archer-Quiver-Goddess on Couch Type to Chandragupta I, designed and struck prior to the development of the lotus petals under the feet of Lakṣmī on the reverse.

Figure 2.34. Evolution of the design of the standing goddess during the fourth century AD on Gupta coins.

F. Kāchagupta (AD 378): *Chakradhvaja* Type. The goddess holds a simple flower and a cornucopia. BM 1910,04503.05. 7.67 g, 21 mm.
G. Kāchagupta (AD 379–382): *Chakradhvaja* with *Garuḍa*. Issued by the royal mint after he takes over the throne. The Goddess holds a fully defined lotus flower and a stylized *bījakoṣā.* Coin **256**.
H. Chandragupta II (AD 383–412): Lakṣmī stands on lotus petals and holds a full lotus flower in her left hand. Coin **365**, 7.91 g.

A similar transformation of design of standing Lakṣmī is also seen on the designs which start off with the goddess seated on a throne with her feet over a lion into the design of a goddess seated on a lion: the *Siṁhavāhinī* Lakṣmī as seen on reverse of the coins I and J below. It is fascinating to see this Goddess design transform from her seated on a throne with her feet on a lion (I) to a final design of the Goddess seated on a Lion (K). This is discussed in detail in the next section.

Figure 2.35. Evolution of the goddess seated on a throne into a goddess seated a lion as seen on Gupta coins.

I. Chandragupta I (AD 319–343): King and Queen Type. The goddess sits on a throne with her feet on a lion. She holds a diadem in her right hand and a cornucopia in her left hand. Coin **50**, 7.40 g, 22 mm.
J. Chandragupta I or II?: Lion-Slayer Type. The goddess sits on a lion, throne still shown behind her, and she still holds a cornucopia. Coin **453**, 7.72 g, 19 mm.
K. Chandragupta II Lion-Slayer Type. The goddess holds a lotus flower in her left hand and a *Pāśa* in her right hand while seated on a lion. Coin **500**, 7.89 g, 23 mm.

The King and Queen Type coins initially issued by Chandragupta I show a design of a goddess seated on a throne with her legs over a recumbent lion. This design was adapted from the Kuṣāṇa coins of the goddess Nanā on Lion Type coins. The design eventually evolves into a *Siṁhavāhinī Lakṣmī* as the final design under Chandragupta II.[16] Altekar and Allan both assigned these coins to Chandragupta II. Based on the earlier design elements on reverse of the first coin (coin I, J), it is apparent that these were struck much earlier than the time of Chandragupta II or possibly at the very beginning of the reign of Chandragupta II, from a regional mint that was still using the old throne design style. The third Lion-Slayer coin above (coin K) clearly shows the completed transition of the Goddess into a *Siṁhavāhinī Lakṣmī*, and she is now holding a lotus flower in her left hand, which correlates perfectly with the transition seen on the Goddess on Throne into Goddess on Lotus coin designs, thus confirming that by the time Chandragupta II came to power, this new design of a goddess seated on a lion was getting finalized.

The attribution of the Lion-Slayer|Goddess with a throne cannot be fully confirmed as yet. Some scholars will insist that all coins of the *Chandra*-Lion-Slayer Type should only be attributed to Chandragupta II. But iconographic evolution was not static, nor was it immediate and all of the Lion-Slayer Type coins do not show a single codified design. It took decades for designs to transition and gain acceptance. We also see a similar evolution in sculptures from that time. This evolution in the design of a goddess seated on a throne with her feet on a lion takes place around the fourth century AD and is discussed below.[17]

2.9. Iconography of the Different Forms of Lakṣmī and Goddesses on Gupta Coins

In the mid-fourth century AD, around the time of Samudragupta's reign, there was a major revival of ancient Vedic religious thought. While the concepts of the deities and their attributes were very clear, the imagery was still evolving and yet to be finalized. Even though the concept of Lakṣmī was there and quite entrenched from ancient times, the iconography was not yet fixed. This struggle to portray the deity with a standardized form that matched the attributes that were being laid down in the Purāṇas was evolving, and it is during the end of the fourth century AD, around the time of Chandragupta II's reign, that the imagery finally reaches a level of standardization.

We see this clearly on gold coins where the foreign deity Ardokṣo is copied on early Gupta coins, and then the mints have the challenge to convert this image into an Indian deity—but which one should it be? Should it be Durgā or the imagery of the *Siṁhavāhinī* Lakṣmī? If it is Lakṣmī alone, which of the *Astha* Lakṣmīs should she be, or should she be a synthesis of all of them? The definition of art is the free form expression of creative thought, and it is best seen here with the craftsmen creating new dies with their interpretations of the attributes, thus creating a time capsule, which now helps us establish the timeline and the evolution of the iconography seen within.

This changing design of the goddess on the gold coins points to syncretistic design evolution leading to a defined iconography of Hindu goddesses during the fourth–sixth centuries AD. Goddess Ardokṣo sitting on a throne holding a cornucopia and a diadem, evolving into a goddess seated on a throne with her feet on a lion, which then transforms into a goddess seated on a lotus, or a goddess seated on a lion, all point to the gradual codification of Hindu iconography, slowly leading to the creation of clear identities for each of the forms of Lakṣmī.

16. See the on Lion-Slayer Type coins of Chandragupta I or II. An expanded discussion on these Lion-Slayer coins with the Goddess seated on a throne with her feet on a lion can be seen ahead in the Lion-Slayer Type discussion, pp. 333–34.

17. Using the evolution seen on the gold coins as a chronological reference point, it is not possible to reassess and correct the dates assigned to sculptures, which so far had been assigned a broad fourth-sixth century AD time frame.

The depiction of Lakṣmī as the consort of Lord Viṣṇu with the lotus is seen clearly in the imagery from "the early Buddhist art of Sānchi, Bhārhut, Bodhgayā, and Amarāvati either standing or seated on a lotus, holding a lotus in her hand, surrounded by blooming lotus and spreading lotus leaves."[18] Altekar identified the Goddess on the lion as a *Siṁhavāhinī Durgā*; R. K. Dikshit identified her as a *Siṁhavāhinī* Lakṣmī; Shukla identified her as Śaiva-Lakṣmī; and as Mahā Lakṣmī riding a lion was identified by Mishra. The imagery of Goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī on a lion continued to evolve during the Gupta era, as can be seen clearly on the Bilsād Pillar which has an inscription of Kumāragupta I from year GE 96 (AD 415). This pillar bears an image of a *Siṁhavāhinī* Lakṣmī, further confirmed by a later image of Lakṣmī seated in the lap of Viṣṇu, with her left leg resting on a lion, from the Kandaria Mahadeva temple at Khajuraho.[19]

The Sanskrit devotional hymn revering Śrī Lakṣmī, *ŚrīSūkta*, lays out all traits that characterize her in the late classical period of the Hindu mythology and art within which she is praised as the lotus-born (*Padma Sambhava*); standing on a lotus (*Padmasthita*); lotus-colored (*Padmavarna*); lotus-thighed (*Padmauru*); lotus-eyed (*Padmakshi-Padmini*); decked with garlands of lotuses (*Padma-malini*) and lotus-faced (*Padmanana*), denoting that she is a symbol of fertility, bestowing good health, long life, prosperity, offspring, and fame. As per the *Durgā Saptashatī*, Devī manifests herself as Lakṣmī and is always shown with 18 hands holding an axe, arrow, bell, *chakra*, conch, *pāśa*, mace, pitcher, rod, rosary, thunderbolt, shield, *Śaktī*, and sword. In the *Amsumad Bhedagama* and the *Silparatna* she is described with two hands, holding a lotus stalk with flower in her right hand and the *bilva* fruit in her left hand. She had to be adorned with pearl necklaces and ornaments, with the figure of a young, beautiful, and youthful maiden.

Figure 2.36. Lakṣmī (l.) holds a lotus in her right hand and a *kalaśa* in her left hand. Fifth century AD, found in Morena, MP. BhM. Early representation of Lakṣmī (r.) standing and arising from lotus pods and petals. Fourth–fifth century AD, red sandstone. Jamalpur, Mathurā, UP. NM.

18. Rao 2008: 42–43.
19. Rao 2008: 43.

In Hindu mythology, Lakṣmī is the bestower of riches and is personified as the *Astha* Lakṣmīs (eight Lakṣmīs). A study of the iconography of the different forms of Lakṣmī confirms that the imagery of the goddess shown on the reverse of the Gupta coins was a synthesis of these *Astha* Lakṣmīs with designs created for different dies within the same coin type, incorporating different attributes from the iconography of Adi Lakṣmī where she may either be holding a lotus, a long scarf, or hands in a *abhaya* or *varada* mudra pose; Aishwarya Lakṣmī where she carries a lotus in each of her two hands; Dhana Lakṣmī where she may have one hand in *abhaya* mudra pose with gold coins flowing from it; Gaja Lakṣmī, while never seen on Gupta coins, the design with elephants showering the goddess with water.[20] Veera Lakṣmī also has the lion as her *vāhana.* On the Elephant-Rider coins of Kumāragupta I, we see the depiction of Lakṣmī as mentioned in the *Mārkandeya Purāṇa,* as the keeper of the eight *nidhis*—the eight treasures as the goddess of wealth—the *Padma, Mahā Padma, Mākāra, Kacchapa, Mukunda, Bilva, Ananda*, and *Śaṅkha*.[21]

2.10. Cornucopia

The device held in the hand of the goddess on the Kuṣāṇa as well as the early Gupta gold coins has been referred to by scholars as a cornucopia. Allan believed as the significance of a cornucopia was unintelligible to the Hindus; the motif must have been borrowed from Roman art.[22] In Roman art, the cornucopia is a well-known attribute of the goddesses Abundantia and Fortuna. In Greek mythology, Herakles, while dueling other suitors for the hand of Deianeira, breaks of a horn of the river god Achelous who had taken on the form of a bull. Once Herakles was the victor, the river nymphs retrieved the horn and filled it with fruits and grain and presented this horn of abundance—*cornucopia*—to the Goddess of Plenty called Fortuna.

In Hindu Vedic rituals, the horn is an important part of the *yajña*. In Hindu literature, the gods Śiva and Viṣṇu are both associated firmly with *śriṅga* (horns) and the *Atharvaveda*, *Saṁhitās*, and later during the Gupta era, the *Brāhamanas* and the *Purānas*, all include the horn as an important device symbolizing magical and medicinal properties.[23] The *Saṁhitās* and the *Brāhamanas* associate the horn with holy power, the womb, and as a symbol of sex and fertility as emphasized in the *Kapisthala-Katha Saṁhitās* XLII.2.

Figure 2.37. Coin of Emperor Trajan (AD 98–117). Goddess Abundantia holding cornucopia. ACR2-216.

Figure 2.38. Coin of Clodius Albinus Caesar (AD 193–197). Goddess Fortuna on throne. LN93-50.

Figure 2.39. Coin of Kanishka II (AD 230–247). Goddess Ardokṣo-Cornucopia. NM 60-1165-3903.

Figure 2.40. Coin of Chandragupta II. Goddess-Throne. PC 1074.

20. It is important to note that this imagery is often seen in sculptures where Lakṣmī is seated on a lion, a design element frequently seen on the coins.

21. Rajeshwari 1989: 16–22.

22. Allan 1914: xxii.

23. Atharvaveda III, 7–13, VI 44.3.

Figure 2.41. Goddess Nanā on lion, palm cornucopia. MMA 1986.506.12. Stucco. Fourth century AD.

Figure 2.42. Goddess Ardokṣo seated on throne with lotus and cornucopia. Fourth-fifth century AD. Kāśmīr. PC.

Figure 2.43. Goddess Haritī on a lotus. Second century AD. Peshawar. Corfu Museum.

Figure 2.44. Goddess Haritī holding a cornucopia with Pancika. Gandhara. First century AD. BM 1418408001.

The horns of the antelope, bull, rhinoceros, and the tusks of elephants were symbols of treasures—during the coronation of Rāma, following the Vedic tradition of Rājasuya[24] as listed in the *Śatpatha Brāhamana*, he held a black antelope horn in his hand.[25] In the coronation ceremony of Surgiva he is illustrated with water-filled bull horns.[26] Duryodhana consecrates Karna to the office of the commander in chief by lustrating him with sacred water-filled tusks of elephants

24. A ritual prescribed in the Vedas, the *śrauta* ritual is performed at the time of coronation of a king.
25. Rāmāyana II 16.21.
26. Rāmāyana IV 26. 33–34.

and with horns of bulls and rhinoceros, along with jewels and fragrant herbs.[27] In the *Śatpatha Brāhamana*, Manu's boat is rescued by a giant fish with a big horn and in *Mahābhārata* III, 85, Manu tied the boat to the horn of the giant fish *matsya* during the Great Flood. In the *Liṅga Purāna* Śiva is referred to as a *śriṅgin*—horned god, and the imagery of Śiva with horns is seen earliest in the seals from the Indus Valley. In the *Vishnushasaranāma*, Viṣṇu is also given the same horned titles: *Mahāśriṅgin*, *Ekaśriṅgin*, and *śriṅgin*.[28]

Vedic literature also incorporates the horn with Śrī. The *mākāra* is shown in Bhārhut and Mathurā imagery with an elephant snout and two horns or tusks; at Amarāvāti, the *mākāra* yields treasures from within his mouth. In Gandharan art, the cornucopia is shown held by Goddess Haritī, the goddess of procreation or fertility, an image that Vogel asserts could also be Śrī—the goddess of wealth, abundance, and prosperity, and her consort Kubera as the Lord of Treasures (see images of *mākāra* on next page).

The horn of abundance, prosperity, and wealth was not a new concept to Hindus, and it takes on many versions. Trade with the Roman Empire was quite robust as is evidenced by the Roman coins still found in India. The design of a goddess seated on a throne holding a cornucopia eventually found its way into the designs of the reverses of the coins of Kuṣāṇa kings and were later incorporated into the early Gupta coins. This design of the goddess Ardokṣo holding a cornucopia eventually evolved into the goddess Lakṣmī holding a lotus flower. This slow, yet monumental transformation in designs is the story of Gupta numismatic art and is best seen on their gold coins. The subtle clues hidden within the designs, the symbology of the various devices seen within and the profound changes in the art of the Gupta era is truly intriguing. The incorporation of spiritual symbology within a formal context and a fixed imagery for the deities eventually came to define Gupta art.

2.11. Evolution of the Design of the King on Gupta Coins

This transition starts with the earliest Gupta coins issued by Chandragupta I (AD 319–343) through the long reign of his son Samudragupta I. By the end of Samudragupta I's reign, he had successfully consolidated most of northern and central India into a cohesive empire and could now be truly called the first Gupta Emperor. This era ushered in the Golden Age of India, a period when Gupta art was in full bloom. By the end of the reign of Samudragupta I, we start seeing the designs transition as part of ongoing experimentation by the mints to introduce more Indian elements into these gold coins for the Gupta kings. On the obverse we see the king's figure transition from a stiff Kuṣāṇa armor-clad clothing design into fluid figures wearing graceful *kurtās* (tunics), and from a cold climate *kaftan* and pants to shorts or Indian *dhotī*. This was a gradual change. Innovative designs were introduced by the Royal Mint, but coins were designed and struck by different regional mints spread out across the vast empire, and not all mints immediately adopted new body or clothing styles.

Long or short tunics, with or without buttons, studs, or jewels, were a mainstay of Gandharan and Mathurā art, and this Indo-Scythian costume style was prominent in the Kuṣāṇa art.[29] This clothing style is seen on the gold and bronze coins of Kanishka I, Huvishka, and Vasudeva I, which are still found in and around the Mathurā, UP region in India. The Gupta mints continued

27. Mahābhārata VIII 6–37.

28. Chandra 1964–66: 1–33.

29. John M. Rosenfield 1967. *Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Göbl figs. 7, 9, (1984); Rosenfield figs. 12, 13, 22, 59, 109.

Transition of clothing and body style from Kuṣāṇa style to Gupta style, fourth–sixth c. AD.

to experiment and introduce new clothing designs over time as their designs evolved away from Kuṣāṇa influence, reaching its peak in the mid-fifth century AD. Excellent examples of such a fully Indian clothing design, free from outside influences, can be seen on the coins struck later in fifth century AD in coins issued by Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I onwards, which shows a king wearing a short *dhotī*, bare-chested, and adorned with necklace, bracelet. Hair styles started with a tight cap, which transitioned into flowing hair, curly hair with jeweled crowns and diadems, even balding head, braids, and a *Jaṭā-Mukuṭa* hairstyle. Kings body styles were shown as young, graceful yet powerful and muscular bodies to middle aged body and aged older looks. The imagery developed in tandem with sculptures and mural paintings as seen in the Ajanta Caves—action-packed scenes with graceful bodies bedecked in fine garments and jewels wearing crowns with pearls and gems.

Figure 2.45. Tiger-Slayer Type coin of Samudragupta. Rev.: Goddess Gaṅgā stands on a *mākāra,* holding a lotus. Spink Taisei 9, SkC. 7.63 g, 21 mm.

2.12. GODDESS GAṄGĀ AND THE CHANDRADHVAJA

The imagery of Goddess Gaṅgā starts to be fully defined in the Gupta age as is evidenced from the ancient literature like Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* and the various *Purānas* written during that time. In the *Kumārasambhava,* Canto 7:42, Kālidāsa describes that Gaṅgā and Yamuna should both hold the *cāmara* (*Chaurī*). The *Vishnudharamottara Purānas,* composed in the sixth–seventh century AD, state that the personification of Gaṅgā should always show her on her *vāhana,* the *mākāra* (3.42.51).

The Viṣṇu temple at Deogarh (Dashavatara Temple) is probably one of the most beautiful works of Gupta art, dated to around the end of the fifth century AD, showing both the Gaṅgā and Yamuna standing on their respective *vāhanas,* holding *Chaurīs* in their raised hands. Gaṅgā's other hand hangs down, while Yamuna's other hand rests on her hip (fourth level above the lintel). In a new unique design of the Tiger-Slayer Type coin, first introduced by Samudragupta I, we can see a clear transition from the earlier Kuṣāṇa prototypes. The king is shown wearing a *dhotī* and a beautiful majestic crown. He is shooting an arrow from an Indian long bow at a tiger falling on its back. The graceful figure of the king has sharp features, adorned with beautiful jewelry and wears big earrings. This action-packed scene portrayed an important message to the masses that the king is indeed invincible and powerful capable of not only uniting the land, but also valiant enough to face off with the king of the jungle, the fierce Indian tiger.

On the reverse of this coin, the Goddess Gaṅgā is shown holding a lotus flower in her left hand, standing on the *mākāra,* the elephant-headed mythical fish of the river Ganges. On the door jamb

Figure 2.46. Gaṅgā standing on *mākāra.* Fifth century AD. Besnagar, Madhya Pradesh. MFA Boston 26.26.

Figure 2.47. Gaṅgā, Buxar. Fifth century AD.

from the temple at Buxar, Bihar, ca. fifth century AD, Gaṅgā is shown standing on a *mākāra* whose mouth is open and has a long lotus stalk coming out, which is held by the goddess in her left hand. This correlates perfectly with the design of the goddess holding a lotus stalk in her hand, as seen on the Tiger-Slayer coins of Samudragupta. Another unique design element is hidden in the imagery of the lotus stalk held by the goddess. The root of the lotus emerging from the mouth of the *mākāra* is identical to the design we see on reverse of the Class II coins of Kumāragupta I's Horseman Type (coins **662**, **663**, p. 388).

On the reverse, and on the obverse of a few varieties—of Tiger-Slayer Type gold coins, in front of the goddess we see a similar crescent-topped standard. This crescent-topped standard—a *Chandradhvaja* is a Śaivite device—is also seen on the King and Queen and Battle-Axe Type coins. Gaṅgā is one of the attributes of Śiva. The epithet *Gaṅgādhara* refers to the flow of the holy river Ganges from Śiva's matted hair locks to purify the earth. The imagery of Gaṅgā and the crescent, as well as the *Chandradhvaja* seen on these Tiger-Slayer coins, all point to the Gupta kings paying homage to the mighty Śiva. While we do not see the *triśūla* (trident) featured on any Gupta gold coins, we do see it on Kumāragupta I silver coins, as well as Śiva's bull *nandī,* featured on the silver coins of Skandagupta.

2.13. Religion during the Gupta Era

The Gupta Empire seems to be at the center of the confluence of four of the five main faiths that were gaining steam during the fourth and fifth centuries AD: Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, Śaktism, and Buddhism were based primarily in present day Uttar Pradesh and Bihar: Mathurā, Ayodhyā, Kāśī, Māgadha, and Sārnāth. The Gupta coins and sculptures from these regions all reflect these same themes. Allan points to the Purānic passage as a reference to Chandragupta I and the extent of his empire which was limited to the areas surrounding the river Gaṅgā, present-day Allahabad, Ayodhyā, and the Māgadha region:

Anu Gaṅgā Prayāgamcha Sāketam Māgadharhstathā,
Etān janapadān sarvān bhokshyante Gupta vamsajāh

The Chinese traveller, Yijing's (I-tsing) account of his travels in India during AD 671–695 refers to the account of the Korean monk Hui-Lun which recalls that *Mahārāja* Chi-li-ki-built a Buddhist temple for the use of the Chinese priests and endowed twenty-four villages for its maintenance. Chi-li-ki-to is the same as *Śrīgupta* and apart from the fact that he was a supporter of Buddhism, one must keep in mind that he must have been a king of substance and means to be able to help build a monastery as well as be in a position to donate twenty-four villages towards this effort. In Gupta seals and inscriptions discussed ahead, Śrīgupta is referred to with the royal title of *Mahārājā.* Scholars in the past have been quick to discount him as someone who may have existed as a minor inconsequential character and one who did not really contribute to the Gupta Dynasty or their advancement. This dismissive attitude needs to be recalibrated based on all the new evidence coming to light and presented ahead.

Based on the account of the Korean monk Hui-Lun, Śrīgupta's religious leanings were quite liberal—a gesture that was also emulated by later Gupta kings who were very supportive of the different Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain faiths. Samudragupta I granted permission to the Śrī Laṅkan Buddhist monks to build a monastery at Bodhgayā, a gesture emulated by Kumāragupta I and as evidenced by Narasiṁhagupta's support of Nālandā, the Buddhist university. The presence of Śiva's trident on the seals and sealings of Śrīgupta and Samudragupta, and the coins of Kumāragupta and Skandagupta, all reflect an affinity to the Śaivite faith. The placement of the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on the gold coins struck by Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta affirmed their veneration of the Buddhist and Jain faiths, both of which incorporate the *Śrīvatsa* symbol in their sculptures and art. In Jainism, the tenth *Tirthaṅkara* is identified by the presence of the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on his chest. Vidya Dehejia describes it best in her essay on recognizing the gods: "In India, the aim of art was never to imitate nature or to recreate reality through illusionistic devices; rather, the goal was to produce an idealized form. Sculptors did not model their images on living beings: whether the subject was a god or a mortal, the artist strove to convey a stylized ideal."[30] From the use of auspicious symbols to represent certain aspects of dharma to the use of *mudras*—hand gestures to convey actions and various poses—all found their way into the iconography of Gupta art, sculptures, as well as coins. In the Berlin Museum bronze sculpture above, Viṣṇu holds a right-opening conch shell and a lotus flower in his hands. A *vanamālā* is prominently shown draped across his body. The *vanamālā* is also seen on the early Gupta gold coins: Chandragupta I, Archer Type, Class I, Var. C; Archer Type, Class II; and Chandragupta II Chhatra Type, Class I, Var. A.3. As each of these coins are linked by this *vanamālā,* it is quite possible that based on this link, the Chhatra coins may have been issued by Chandragupta I and not Chandragupta II. In the iconography of Viṣṇu, the *vanamālā* represents the "wealth of the forest," the image of *Maya* (illusion).

30. metmuseum.org.

Figure 2.48. Viṣṇu. Berlin, Museum of Asian Art 458413. Bronze.

While discussing the imagery of Viṣṇu and *chakra* in Hindu art, Pratapaditya Pal writes that the *Vishnudharamottara,* after stating that "the god Viṣṇu himself is immovable and he moves the wheel," provides at least three different explanations of the wheel. It informs us that "the sun and the moon represent Puruṣa and Prakriti, which are symbolized by the wheel and the mace respectively;" elsewhere, the wheel represents "the rotation of the world...the Wheel of Law, the Wheel of Time and the circular part of the planets;" and thirdly, the wheel is said to signify air (*pavana*).[31] From an iconographic standpoint, the imagery of Śiva and Viṣṇu and his *avatārs* are subtly represented on the Gupta coinage. As we have seen, the Gupta mints created new and innovative coin designs by incorporating design elements emerging within sculptural imagery of the *avatāras* (incarnations) of Viṣṇu and of Śiva:

31. Pal 1973: 23–34.

Parasu Rāmaavatara (the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu-Rāma). Battle-Axe. On the Battle-Axe Type coins, the king holds the Battle-Axe with a *Vāmana*: the dwarf, as possibly either a *Audhpurush* (personification of *chakra)* or as the fifth incarnation of Viṣṇu. The Battle-Axe is also seen as an attribute of Śiva in his various renditions.

Rāmachandraavatara (the seventh incarnation of Viṣṇu: King Rāma). Archer Type where the king is shown identical to the attributes of iconography of King Rāma. He stands in a *Tribhaṅga* pose, holding an arrow in his right hand and a bow in his left hand. *Lakṣmī Narayna*: a representation of Viṣṇu sitting with one of his legs hanging down, one leg folded up next to his consort Lakṣmī.

The mistake most art historians make when studying this design evolution, is that they tend to look at the imagery from the Gupta period as a single period, referring to it as "the Gupta style" covering the period of the fourth–sixth centuries AD, when in fact that is the wrong way to study this period. We need to look at the Gupta era in much smaller increments. The speed of evolution in design as recorded on the gold coins of Chandragupta I, through the reign of Samudragupta, and finally during the reign of Chandragupta II is staggering. While this same evolution can be seen in early Gupta sculptures and terracottas, it is neither as complete, nor as well preserved as the imagery seen on the gold coins. This early Gupta period, starting with the beginning of the fourth century through the fifth century AD, saw the imagery of each of the major deities in the Hindu pantheon be codified in the *Śilpaśāstra* (which served more as a guide, rather than as a manual): "An official Hindu iconography was formed out of manifold cults and their synthesis in the competing brāhmaṇical ideologies under Gupta rule."[32] The most consequential contribution to visual arts during this period was the standardization of iconography and iconometry (*Tālamāna*), and the development of artistic technique.[33]

Gupta style continued to evolve and was dynamic. It touched not only the imagery of the deities, but also the devices that are portrayed with the deities. The Indianization of the foreign elements as seen on the coins takes place in the fourth century AD: changing the cornucopia to the *bījakoṣā*; kings wearing a diadem as the symbol of royalty to the king wearing a crown or a *mukuṭa* as seen on the Samudragupta I's Tiger-Slayer Type coins. The Gupta kings were the pioneers in patronizing the iconic images of Hindu goddesses on their monuments. The Gupta period created images of Hindu deities that were to become models for the future generations of lndian sculptors.

2.14. The Diadem, Pāśa, and the Aśvamedha

The diadem is a type of a crown, worn around the king's forehead, as a symbol of royalty and sovereign authority. It was a design element that was copied from Kuṣāṇa coins (who had themselves borrowed this design element from the Romans) on the coins struck mostly by Chandragupta I and Samudragupta I. By the time Chandragupta II issued his coins, the diadem is no longer seen on gold coins and barring a few rare exceptions, it mostly disappears on coin designs and is replaced by a *mukuṭa*, a crown.

32. Goetz 1974: 85.
33. Wangu 2003: 72.

Figure 2.49. Diadem and crowns from the Gupta period as seen on coins. Top: Gold diadem from India (MMA 1988.395a–c. Imagery on this diadem matches jewelry from the Gupta period (fourth–fifth centuries AD). Middle Row, left: Obverse of silver coin of Kumāragupta I Trident Type. Bottom row, left to right: (1) silver coin of Skandagupta I Altar Type. Gold coins of (2) Chandragupta I, (3–4) Samudragupta I, (5) Chandragupta II.

In the coin in Fig. 2.51, the king wears a diadem on his head; this headgear seen on the early Gupta coins started with a copy of the Kuṣāṇa style of a tight-fitting cap and a diadem, which transitioned to the king sometimes shown wearing a crown as seen on the Tiger-Slayer Type coins of Samudragupta. On the reverse of these coins, the goddess holds a rope-like device in her right hand, which has been the subject of much debate over the past century. Vincent Smith preferred to call this device a fillet, stating, "if the figure (on the reverse) represents Victory, no doubt the nomenclature is correct."[34] Allan also preferred to call it a fillet. Altekar used the term "noose" to describe it. Like the evolution of the lotus flower, this device also continues to evolve from a simple rope-like device looped and held by the goddess—as seen on the early coins of Samudragupta, like the coin above—to a long and wide scarf or stole-like cloth held by the goddess (as seen on the Chhatra Type coins of Skandagupta).

According to the *Mārkandeya Purāna,* dated to the fourth century AD, the goddess Durgā *(Mahā Lakṣmī)* killed a demon called Mahiṣāsura by first capturing the demon (in the form of a buffalo) by throwing a noose over it and then killing it with a spear/trident. Hence, she is called the *Mahiṣasuramarddinī.* This was a story about the triumph of good over evil, light over dark, the victory of the *Devas* over the *Asuras.*

Mahiṣasuramarddinī is one of the most venerated aspects of Devī in the Śaivite pantheon and her imagery and iconography continued to evolve over time.[35] In early Kuṣāṇa imagery, we see Durgā sometimes holding a club, a spear, in others a trident while *Mahiṣasuramarddinī* is shown as also holding *Pāśa* in one of her many hands.[36]

34. Smith 1884: 128.
35. Wangu 2003; Veinnot: 368.
36. Agarwala 1964.

Figure 2.50. Warrior prince with diadem. Stupa Vedica. 100 BC. Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Figure 2.51. Samudragupta. Javelin Type Class I, A.1. King wears diadem. PC, 1019.

The reference to this noose device as a *Pāśa*—a noose or lasso held by some forms of Devī—signifies the power to bind and in its subtle form. It is the symbol of desire suggesting that the divine power to will to bring about phenomenal existence *(icchhāśakti).* The *lalitāsahasranāma,* is a sacred Hindu text from the *Barhmanda Puranā* for the worshippers of Goddess Lalita Devī, the Divine Mother or Goddess Durgā, in the form of *Śakti.* In this text, in verses two and three, she is referred to as *Ragasvarupa Pashadhya* (the one who is the embodiment of love and the who is holding the rope). Durgā's personification into *Mahiṣasuramarddinī*'s imagery is finalized only in the Gupta period, depicting her in human form holding the weapons including the *Pāśa,* the depiction of good winning over evil.[37] The *Pāśa* here suggests the power of knowledge *(jñāna-śakti).* In the Buddhist context, the *Pāśa* is always associated with an elephant goad as twin elements of subjugation of a "wild elephant," a Buddhist metaphor for an untamed mind. In its peaceful aspect, the noose represents the binding of wisdom or awareness.[38]

Figure 2.52. The goddess holds a royal beaded diadem (*Pāśa*) with her right hand on Gupta coins. Left to right: Chandragupta I Rājadaṇḍa Type (p. 220), Samudragupta I Javelin Type (p. 243), Chandragupta II Archer Type (p. 301), Kumāragupta I Goddess on Lotus Type (p. 364).

While this device was referred to as a diadem in context of Kuṣāṇa coins, on Gupta coins its significance needs to be understood in the view of the design evolution at that time and place in the third through sixth centuries AD in northern and northwestern India. As part of the gradual evolution of the goddess Ardokṣo into Lakṣmī, this noose device held in her right hand may signify

37. Rajeshwari 1989: 55.
38. Beer 2003.

the concept of a *Pāśa,* or it may be a reference to the personification of Rājya-Lakṣmī, the goddess who blesses the kings and protects the wealth of an empire. The iconography of the noose or *Pāśa* held by the goddess Lakṣmī is only seen on coins and is rarely seen in sculpture, which may be another clue to its significance here confirming the concept of Rājya Lakṣmī. Pratapaditya Pal also suggested that the goddess shown on the reverse of the *Aśvamedha* Type coins, who holds a *Chaurī,* might in fact be a representation of Rājya Lakṣmī.[39] At the same time, *Mahiṣasuramarddinī* (i.e., Durgā) is seen emerging in importance in northern India and her imagery clearly shows her holding the *Pāśa* as a weapon. On coins, we find the goddess Lakṣmī holding a *Pāśa* in her hand on the reverse of the coins, while on the obverse, we do also see a diadem tied across the forehead of the king, primarily on coins of Chandragupta I and Samudragupta.

That the goddess Durgā-*Mahiṣasuramarddinī* was accepted by the Gupta orthodoxy as an important deity is evident by her images which appear in Caves 6 and 17 in the Udayagirī Hills dated AD 401, the year of Chandragupta II's long campaign against Western Kṣatrapas.

Figure 2.53. *Mahiṣasuramarddinī*, Cave 17, Udayagirī, MP.

Figure 2.54. Rajghat sealing showing *Aśvamedha* and *Mahiṣasuramarddinī* scene (K. B. Iyer, 1969).

On a Gupta period terracotta sealing from Rajghat, *Mahiṣasuramarddinī* Devī is shown on the obverse, triumphantly standing above a slain buffalo with a javelin in her lower-right hand. The reverse is divided into three parts: (1) a three-headed figure of Śiva (incorrectly identified by the author as Brahmā); (2) the figure of horse on its side next to a female figure with its legs apart in coupling posture; and (3) the term "*Chhandoga*" in Gupta Brāhmī letters: "one who sings Vedic hymns."[40] Thaplyal also discussed other Rajghat sealings from the early Gupta period, with Śaivite symbols and *Aśvamedha* scenes depicted on them.[41] A few of these *Chhandoga* sealings from the Gupta period show a lady pouring flowers on a *sūchī,* as well as sealings with the bull, Durgā, *chakra, Śanka,* and *Ganeśa*.[42] This imagery depicting an obvious *Aśvamedha* sacrifice begs us to consider Śaivite design elements when considering the analysis of the Gupta *Aśvamedha* Type coins. So far,

39. Pal 1988: 197–205.
40. Iyer 1969: 180.
41. Thaplyal 1973: 248–256.
42. See discussion below on the *Aśvamedha* ritual to better understand the coupling posture.

the narrative on the identification of the Goddess seen on the reverse of these *Aśvamedha* gold coins revolves around a generalization that she must be Samudragupta's chief queen.[43]

Here, it is important to bring the reader's attention to another *Chaurī*-bearing goddess shown on the reverse of the *Aśvamedha* Type coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I. John Allan stated "she must be identified as Samudragupta's chief queen (*Mahisi*), probably Dattadevī, who played an important part in the sacrifice."[44] Altekar agrees with Allan (p. 21), as do most scholars. On the reverse of these *Aśvamedha* coins, the female figure is shown with a halo. This use of the halo usually points to a divinity; however, and as we also see the halo around the head of the king, it is possible that the queen can also be shown with a halo.

Figure 2.55. Gupta coins (l.) showing an *Aśvamedha* (fourth-fifth century AD). Didarganj Yakshi (r.) with *Chaurī* (BSM). Third century BC. *Aśvamedha* Type coins of Samudragupta I (top, p. 261) and Kumāragupta I (bottom, p. 372).

Rather than assign a specific label to this female figure and try to fit her into an established narrative, it is first important to understand that Samudragupta I does not refer to himself as a *Parama bhāgavata* in any of his coin legends or on any of his official inscriptions. Rather, later kings refer to him as such.[45] We see the largest number of Śaivite iconographic and design elements on coins issued by Samudragupta in the mid-fourth century AD and on these coins it is subtle, not direct, as seen on a Kumāragupta I Trident Type silver coin or in Skandagupta's Bull Type or Bull and Trident Type coins. On Samudragupta's coins, the use of the crescent standard prominently on the obverse as well as the reverse, the choice of featuring Goddess Gaṅgā standing on a *mākāra* on the reverse of the Tiger-Slayer Type coins, the use of the crescent standard on his Battle-Axe Type coins, as well as the crescent seen on the head of the king as shown on coins of the Javelin Type Variety A2.4 and E6 (*Jaṭā-Mukuṭa*, the crescent crown used primarily as iconography of *Śiva*), all

43. Alan 1967: lxxvii.

44. Allan 1914: lxxvii.

45. The Gayā and Nālandā copper plates refer to him as *Parama bhāgavata* but these two plates are considered spurious by Fleet, D. C. Sircar, and Ajit Ghose, and were possibly created in the eighth century; see also Sastri 1997: 77–79.

point to a strong Śaivite leaning. Here, we must also consider the clay plaque that was published by Radhakrishna Choudhary, which was found in 1950 within the Naulagarh archaeological site-district Monghyr, Bihar. The clay plaque has two seal impressions side-by-side.[46] These two oval seal impressions have a *triśūla* altar on the top half and a legend below in Brāhmī script. The legend is clear and reads as *Śrī Samudra*. Choudhary states that on paleographic grounds, this script matches the legend seen on the gold coins of Samudragupta.[47]

Figure 2.56. *Toraṇa* (lintel) decorated with an *Aśvamedha* celebration scene showing a hornless male goat by a *Yūpa*, Pawaya, Gupta period. Gujari Mahal Museum, Gwalior.

Given the above clues from the gold coins, the Rajghat seal, and the Naulagarh plaque, should we still be referring to the *Chaurī*-bearing female deity on the *Aśvamedha* Type as a queen? The answer is simply no. Hiltebeitel argued that she was *Śrī* signifying prosperity and sovereignty.[48] Considering that on the *Aśvamedha* Type coins she is shown standing facing a *Mahā-Śakti* spear, one can only assume that she is not a queen but, in fact, could possibly be either *Rājya Lakṣmī* or a River Goddess personification of either Gaṅgā or Yamuna. The iconography of these two river goddesses from the early fourth to fifth century suggests that they are to be shown as holding *cāmarās—Chaurīs,* but their respective *vāhana* are missing on the reverse designs of these *Aśvamedha* Type coins.[49] In the absence of conclusive evidence confirming the attribution of this figure as a river goddess, for the purposes of classification in this book, I will use the term *Rājya Lakṣmī*, as on a few of the *Aśvamedha* coins, the goddess seems to be holding a diadem or a *Pāśa* in her left hand while standing on a bed of flower petals. As such, I agree with P. L. Gupta and Śrivastava's suggestion that this goddess on the *Aśvamedha* coins is *Rājya Lakṣmī*.[50]

Details and records on the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice and rituals are listed in the ancient Hindu Vedic literature, the *Manu-Smrti* and the *Mahā-Bhāsya* of *Patañjali* and other epigraphic records. The earliest reference to an *Aśvamedha* is found in the *Rigveda,* which lays down the rites for the selection of a white stallion, which is purified through elaborate rituals and then released in a northeasterly direction (assumed to be the way to the gods), to wander at will into territories that may have been unconquered. This stallion was escorted by 100 princes born in wedlock,

46. The second impression was apparently made because the first impression was not clean enough.
47. Choudhary 1964; sealing illustrated at end of the Samudragupta Coins section.
48. Hiltebeitel 1976: 143–48.
49. Pandey 1984: 111.
50. P. L. Gupta 1981: 13.

Figure 2.57. Sealing (l.) of Samudragupta I, *Aśvamedha* with a horse standing in front of a *Yūpa*. The Brāhmī legend reads: *Parākramaḥ*. Bone plaque (r.) from Chandraketugarh. PC. Bengal, 1 BC.

100 sons of chiefs, and 100 sons of attendants, all armed and ready to challenge the native rulers. The territories it entered were captured by these warriors escorting the horse, and at the end of the year they returned back with the horse. In the *Śathpatha Brahāmanas,* the sacrificial horse is symbolically equated to *Prajāpati*, which in turn equates the horse with the king.[51]

These texts then lay down the details on how the horse was to be prepared for the sacrifice: after being tied to a sacrificial post, the *yùpa,* along with other sacrificial animals, were tied around it with stakes. This sacrificial horse is richly decorated and then harnessed to a chariot and paraded around the altar grounds along with three other stallions. After this, the horse is unharnessed and the Chief Queen anoints the forepart of the horse; the king's favorite wife anoints the middle section of the horse; and a discarded/barren queen anoints the hindquarters. A gold cloth is spread on the ground and the horse is slaughtered with a gold knife, while an iron knife is used to slaughter the rest of the other animals. After, according to the texts, the Chief Queen lays down with the dead horse and is covered with a cloth and mimics the act of copulation, with the belief that this act confers fertility. At this time, the priests surrounding the queen and horse take part in an erotic dialogue with the queen uttering the following words: "May the vigorous Male, the layer of seed, lay seed!" Propitiatory oblations of blood are offered to *Rudra* (the fearful form of *Śiva)* and the god of death. After this the queen rises from under the cloth, the horse is dissected as prescribed in the *Rigveda*, the portions roasted and offered to *Prajāpati* and the remainder divided among the rest present at the occasion. The ceremony closes with a purifying bath and the distribution of *dakṣiṇa* in the form of booty captured during the wanderings of the horse.[52] "That the *Aśvamedha* had connotations of sexuality, as well as fertility, for the ancient Indians is clearly evident from the Harivamsa episode in which Indra, overcome by desire for Kasya (the wife of King Janamejaya), enters into the stallion consecrated for the sacrifice and unites with the queen during the ritual."[53]

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta does not mention any *Aśvamedha* sacrifices performed by him; however, Diwekar proposed that the reading of the 26th line should be corrected to (in bold):

51. Lindquist 2014: 107.
52. Stutley 1969.
53. O'Flaherty 1971: 15.

[krpa]ṇadī nānāthātura-jan-oddharaṇa ***sattra*** *dīkṣābhyupagata-manasaḥ samiddhasya vigrahavato lokānugrahasya dhanadavaruṇendrāntakasamasya sva-bhuja-balavijitanekanarapati-vibhavapratyarppaṇ ā-nityavyāpṛtāyuktapuruṣasya*

This changes the meaning originally proposed by Fleet to "...whose mind was engaged on being initiated for sacrifice...," thus making the case that the Allahabad pillar *praśasti* was most probably written prior to the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice.[54] The Puṇe copper plate inscriptions of the Vākātākā queen Prabhā Vatigupta (daughter of Chandragupta II), refer to her grandfather King Samudragupta as *anekāsvamedhayājinah*, as the performer of many horse-sacrifices.[55] The large number of the *Aśvamedha* Type coins found with the legend *Parakramah,* supports Prabhāvatīgupta's use of the term *anekāsvamedhayājinah,* that her grandfather Samudragupta did indeed perform many sacrifices.

In the Nālandā and Gayā copper plates, Samudragupta has been referred to as *Chirotsannā śvamedhāhārttā*: "the performer of horse-sacrifice which has been long in abeyance," or another interpretation as suggested by Thaplyal: "an *Aśvamedha* sacrifice in full details meticulously, and that before him, for a long time the sacrifices had not been performed in that way."[56] Bhanḍarkar points out that the sacrifice was not just performed by the supreme rulers of lndia, but seems to have been performed regularly by the smaller feudatory kings during ancient times.[57] The concept of subjugating the surrounding territories and frontier provinces by the king aspiring to be *Chakravartin* called for him to perform a sacrifice called *Sarvajit*.[58]

The *Aśvamedha* by itself does not presuppose the expansion of the kingdom, and if the intent was expansion, then it requires an additional *dig-vijaya* to be performed in addition to the *Aśvamedha*. Conversely, it is possible to perform multiple horse sacrifices, as was done by the Vākātākā, Bhāraśivas, etc., and not necessarily seek expansion as may be the case during Kumāragupta I's reign. Of all the Gupta kings, only Samudragupta could have claimed to perform a *Sarvajit-dig-vijaya-Aśvamedha* as "his expeditions of conquest took him to the outlying parts of India." Even though there is no mention of such in the inscriptions of Samudragupta, at a scale reminiscent of the one by Yudhishthira in the Epic period, it is clear that the largest expansion of the Gupta Empire took place during his rule.

The gold coins with *Aśvamedha* imagery have two legends as deciphered by Altekar: (1) *Rājā dhirā jāḥpṛithivī matitvā divaṁ jayatyaḥ itavā jimedhaḥ* ("The King of Kings, who had performed the *Vajimedha* [*Aśvamedha*] sacrifice, wins heaven after protecting the earth);" (2) *Rājādhirājāḥ pṛithivī mvi tit vā divaṁ jayatyaḥ itavā jimedhaḥ* ("The King of Kings, who had performed the *Vajimedha* [*Aśvamedha*] sacrifice, wins heaven after conquering the earth)" and on the reverse the legends are *Aśvamedha Parākramaḥ* and *Hayamedhāparākramahaḥ*—both *Aśva* and *Haya* are Sanskrit words for horse—"He who bears the title *Parākramaḥ* as a result of this performance of the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice."[59] Rapson also published a clay sealing from the British Museum which showed a horse in front of a *yùpa,* with the legend *Parākramaḥ.* This biruda was primarily used by Samudragupta.

Just like the clay sealing, the gold *Aśvamedha* Type coins do not list the name of King Samudragupta, and they only show his biruda *Parākramaḥ,* similar to his Tiger-Slayer Type coins which also only state that he is valiant like the tiger—*Vyāghraparā karamaḥ*—instead of listing his name. On the reverse of *Aśvamedha* coins issued by Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I, we find

54. Diwekar 1926: 165–66.
55. Mirashi 1963: 7.
56. Thaplyal 2012: 269–70.
57. Bhanḍarkar 1934: 115.
58. Krishnamoorthy 1994; Raghuvamsa IV, 86. V,I.
59. Rapson 1901.

the *Mahā-Śaktī* spear adorned with bells, standing vertically in front of the Goddess. This addition of a non-Vaiṣṇavite device—the *Maha-Śakti*—along with other non-Vaiṣṇavite devices such as the crescent standard, *Jaṭā-Mukuṭa* and the Goddess Gaṅgā on other coins of Samudragupta clearly points to a strong Śaivite-leaning influence upon the designs and iconography on the coins from that period. It is clear that by the fourth century AD, Gupta royalty was fully supporting the Brahmanical forms of Hinduism and helping to revive the Vedic practices, which is not only evident from the inscriptional data, but also fully apparent in the coin designs.

2.15. Evolution of Śaivite Iconography on Coins

While the Gupta kings were Vaiṣṇavite (followers of Viṣṇu), their religious views had not yet formed into a monotheistic form of Hinduism and were not limited to worship of a primary deity. Rather, all evidence from that era attests to a more liberal and all-inclusive form of worship of brāhmaṇical Hinduism. The Udayagirī caves and temples complex in Madhya Pradesh feature three caves dedicated to Śiva (caves 4, 6, and 19), to Viṣṇu (caves 5, 6, 12, 13, and 19) and Jainism (caves 1 and 20). At nearby Sānchī, an inscription of Chandragupta II further provides epigraphic evidence of a donation to support the Buddhist sect in that area. Setting up Śaivite temples, *liṅgas*, inscriptional references to Mahādēva, incorporating the Śaivite design elements into their coins and royal seals, establishing the temples, *liṅgas*, and using overt and covert imbedded imagery, all point to a strong royal patronage and a devout patronage to Śiva. The Gupta mints were very good at covertly including hints of Śaivite attributes sometimes prominently and at other times subtly hidden within the complex coin designs. This was the time when Śaivite iconography was omnipresent and slowly being codified during the Classical age of the Guptas. The earliest examples of this Śaivite influence during this Gupta era are found on the terracotta sealings (pp. 197, 278), many of which prominently features a *triśūla*. The addition of the Śaivite devices such as the use of a crescent on the king's head, depiction of Goddess Gaṅgā, and Kārttikeya in the coin designs, all confirm that the Guptas equally venerated Śiva. So far, gold coins with a *triśūla* within the coin designs have yet to be found, but is found frequently on silver, copper, and lead coins. We do find the *Chandradhvaja*—the crescent-topped standard featured prominently on the earliest gold coins struck by Chandragupta I. On the King and Queen Type coins, the king is shown holding a *Chandradhvaja* with his right hand.

Figure 2.58. Rāmagupta Bull (*nandī*) Type. Zeno 218163. 1.35 g, 13 mm. Copper.

Figure 2.59. Kumāragupta I Trident Type. 1.52 g, 12 mm. Silver.

Figure 2.60. Skandagupta Bull (*nandī*) Type. PC, 3273. 1.83 g, 13 mm. Silver.

On one of the earliest Gupta gold coins issued by Chandragupta I, we only see a crescent-topped standard rather than the *triśūla*, which was very prominent on the Kuṣāṇa coins circulating in the same region at that time. On silver coins of Kumāragupta I, we find the Trident Type, which features a *triśūla* in place of a *Garuḍa* on the reverse; most probably these were issued to cater to a local Śaivite population and a few rare (possibly local issues) of his lead coins also show a *nandī* instead of the *Garuḍa*. Skandagupta I's silver coins of Bull Type (above) feature the *triśūla* with nandī together on Trident and Bull Type coins.

Under the Kuṣāṇa rule, the iconography of Śiva continued to evolve, and by the end of this era the iconography of Śiva had fully morphed into a deity holding a *triśūla*. To better understand this Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite iconography, it is important to review the evolution of this imagery prior to the Guptas.

The coinage of the Indian subcontinent starts with the earliest punch mark coins struck in silver across the region. These silver coins with punched designs were produced across the subcontinent by independent states/republics called *janapadas*. These coins have conventionally been dated to ca. 500 BC, and it is on these coins we first get a glimpse of the earliest interpretation of imagery of the Hindu deities.

The Kuṣāṇas were prolific in this issuing a coinage with beautiful imagery depicting a range of deities. For this discussion, we will focus primarily on the deities influencing the Gupta coinage.

2.16. Kuṣāṇa Influence: Nanā on Lion and Siṁhavāhinī Lakṣmī

In his monograph, *Nana on Lion*, B. N. Mukherjee suggested the origins of the goddess seated on a lion could be traced back to Nanā, the Babylonian goddess, who is the same as the Assyrian deity Ishtar. Nanā is also known in mythology as the daughter of the moon god, as well the Greek goddess Artemis. Ishtar and Nanā were also connected with the Persian deity Anāhitā. The Nanā-Aṁbā association can be seen in the King and Queen Type coins where she holds a cornucopia in her left hand suggesting she is the goddess of fortune. In her right hand she holds the royal diadem, thus helping to legitimate the royal couple on the obverse of these coins.

This was an innovative design in coinage but was by no means a new concept to Hindu iconography. This depiction of a Goddess seated on a lion goes back to the earliest representations on seals from Mesopotamia for the Sumerian Goddess Inanna—the goddess of warfare and love dated to around second millennium BC. Similar scenes are found from this same time on the Burney Relief where Ishtar is shown standing with her feet on two lions. In Egypt from the fourteenth century BC we see a similar female goddess Qetesh standing on lion holding a flower and a snake.

Figure 2.61. Inanna resting her feet on a lion. Cylinder seal. 2350–2150 BC. Oriental Institute Museum.

Figure 2.62. Nanā on lion. Red garnet stone seal. Bactria. First–fourth C. AD. BM 1892,1103.100.

Falk proposed that Nanā "…must be regarded as an afterglow of a Venus cult that had its heyday in the first century BC, discernible from Anatolia to the Levante, and from Phoenicia to Rome."[60] Such early representations of a benevolent goddess of fortune, power, love, and the

60. Harry Falk, 2015: 241–99. "Kushan rule granted by Nanā: The background of a heavenly legitimation," *Monographien zur Indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie*. Bremen: Hempen Verlag. Also see discussion the zodiac alignment of Leo and Nanā's scepter, p. 283.

heavens were the forerunners of to the Kuṣāṇa representation of Nanā on sculptures and coins. Nanā's importance as a deity within the Indian subcontinent is attested by the mention of her name in the first line of the Rābāṭak Inscription (AD 127) when referring to the great Kuṣāṇa King Kanishka I: "…Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, the autocrat, the god worthy of worship, who has obtained the kingship from Nanā and from all the gods, who has inaugurated the year one as the gods pleased."[61] An invocation which is very beautifully represented on the gold coins below.

A silver bowl recovered from the Oxus Treasure shows the goddess sitting on a lion, "holding a wheel (of fortune)...a crescent...a patera...and a scepter...." Originating in Central Asia, this bowl design "represents Nanā-Anāhitā-Ishtar," where the goddess is shown wearing a crescent-topped "crown which betrays Sasanian influence."[62] Nanā's transition into Goddess Durgā was a natural evolution and continued to be an important icon for the Gupta kings, who were Vaishnaivites. For them, Durgā seated on a lion was another way to describe Umā/Pārvatī, who is also the Goddess Lakṣmī in one of her many forms.

Under Kanishka I's rule, we see Nanā gain prominence. She is depicted standing upright holding a scepter where the forepart has the shape of zodiac alignment of Leo. This Leo-scepter is always held by Nanā with her right hand as seen in coin A below. Nanā is also shown paired with Śiva/Oesho below.[63] The amalgamation of the concept of Nanā with Uma (Ommo) as the consort of Śiva/Oesho, begins with the coins of Huvishka. On coin B, Śiva is shown with his consort with Nanā, and on coin C as a deity being worshipped by Huvishka. Nanā seated on a lion design first appears on coins issued by Huvishka and later, another similar design in gold by Kanishka II. On the Huvishka coin, Nanā is seated facing to the front, but head turned to right, while the lion is also shown walking to the right. She holds a scepter in the shape of the zodiac alignment of Leo. On Kanishka II's coin design, Nanā is shown seated facing to the front, while she holds a royal scepter in her left hand and her right hand holds the royal diadem, granting the power to rule.[64] Savita Sharma aptly observed "It seems that Ambika, Umā, or Durgā were the counterpart of Nanā, Nanāia or Nanāshao, similarly presiding over the creation, peace and prosperity."[65]

Under the Guptas, this design of Nanā seated on a lion is incorporated into the design for a *Siṁhavāhinī* Lakṣmī. This design is first seen on the King and Queen Type coins issued by Chandragupta I. On reverse, the goddess holds a royal diadem (*Pāśa*) in her right hand and a cornucopia in her left hand. Here, another new element is introduced into the design—on the obverse of these coins, a new scene adapted from the Maithuna imagery prominent in Kuṣāṇa art. This Maithuna/Mithuna Loving Couple imagery was adapted from the Vedic tantric ethos, and under Chandragupta I it is used by the Gupta mints to reinforce the loving couple image of the king and queen. The king is shown holding a *Chandradhvaja*—the crescent-topped Śaivite standard—in his left hand while offering a ring to his wife with his right hand.[66] The legend in Brāhmī under his left arm identifies the king as "Chandra-gupta." Queen Kumāradevī is on the left facing him and is identified as *Śrī Kumāradevī* in the Brāhmī legend behind her. The legend on

61. Nicholas Sims-Williams 2008: 55f. "The Bactrian inscription of Rabatak: A new reading," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 18: 53–68.

62. Mukherjee 1969.

63. Savita Sharma. *Early Indian Symbols*, p. 167.

64. Also see B. N. Mukherjee, *Nana on Lion*, pp. 10–30. Figure 1, 1A.

65. Wesho-Oesho-Śiva. J. Cribb 1997. "Śiva images on Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coins." In *Studies in Silk Road Coins and Culture, papers in Honour of Professor Iko Hirayama on his 65th Birthday*, ed. K. Tanabe, J. Cribb and H. Wang Kamakura, pp. 11–66. This paper has an excellent discussion on the amalgamation and parallels seen of iconographic elements which appear on Kuṣāṇa coinage from the Rudra-Śiva-Vāyu-Indra-Wesho elements and other Greek, Roman, and Iranian deities from the Silk Road culture.

66. This object offered by the king is shown differently on coin designs of this type, ranging from a ring, to a sweet, to a bangle, etc. See pp. 231–36.

Figure 2.63. Goddess Nanā on Kuṣāṇa coins.

A Kanishka I: Nanā holding the Leo scepter in right hand. 7.83 g. PC.
B Huvishka: Oesho facing Nanā on reverse. Quarter-dīnāra. 1.98 g. BM 1894,0506.60.
C Huvishka: The king kneels with folded hands in front of Nanā. 9.78 g. Roma XXII-510.
D Huvishka: Śiva/Oesho at right holds drum, *aṅkuśa* and water pot (*kamaṇḍalu*), goat, *triśūla*. Goddess Nanā at left facing Oesho, holds a flower with her right hand. PC.
E Huvishka: The king holds Spear in left hand. Goddess Nanā riding a lion. Crescent above her head and holds a Leo scepter. PC.
F Kanishka II: The king holds a *triśūla* in left hand. Goddess Nanā sits on a lion facing right. She holds the royal scepter in her left hand, and the royal diadem in her right hand. PC.

the reverse is *Lichchhavayaḥ* commemorating the legendary marriage of Chandragupta I to Princess Kumāradevī of the powerful and royal Lichchhavi clan. Goddess Durgā, shown seated on the lion, was the tutelary goddess of the Lichchhavis (*Siṁhavāhinī* Lakṣmī).

Chandragupta I is assumed to have ruled for approximately twenty-three years.[67] While these King and Queen Type coins struck for Chandragupta I feature a goddess seated on a recumbent lion on their reverse, this goddess (at this early stage of design) does not seem to manifest fully all the attributes of Lakṣmī. Rather, this early depiction of style and design (coin C) shows the same Kuṣāṇa attributes: the stiff figure of the king and Ardokṣo shown with a cornucopia and

67. See Table 1.1, p. 2, for the regnal dates assigned by historians for Chandragupta I.

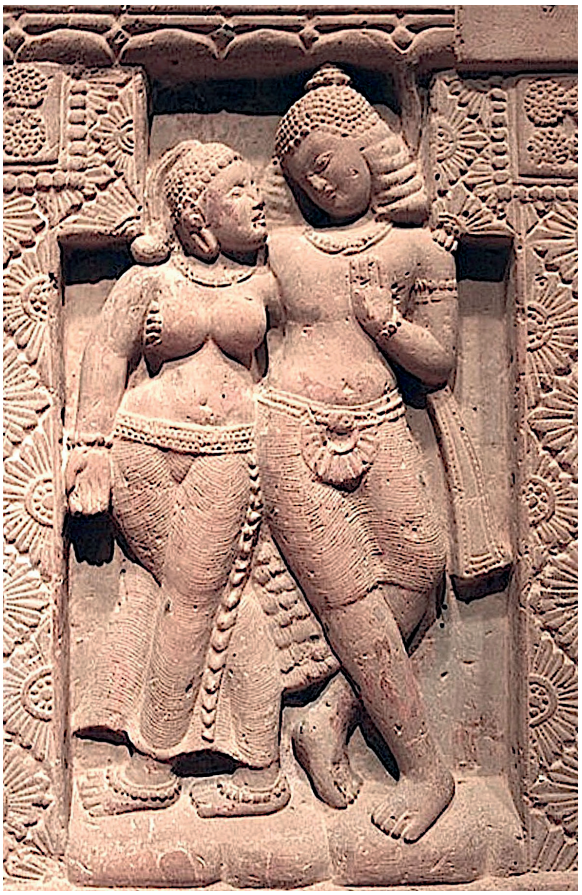


Figure 2.64. Mithuna Couple, terracotta, Gupta period, fourth–fifth c. AD. HAA 12,476.1.

Figure 2.65. Mithuna Couple, terracotta, Kuṣāṇa, Mathurā, UP.
MMA 1986.506.11.

Figure 2.66. Coin of Chandragupta I, King and Queen Type: goddess seated on a lion, mid-late fourth century AD. 7.69 g. BM 1894,506.147.

Figure 2.67. Coin of Chandragupta I, King and Queen Type: goddess seated on a lion throne, early fourth century AD. PC.

the diadem. Behind her body, we can still see the back of a throne matching the throne design as used on the Kuṣāṇa-Ardokṣo reverse coins. These early designs help confirm that these coins were designed and issued at an early stage at the start of the Gupta dynasty gold coinage.

Based on the developed iconography seen later within this coin series, it seems that this King and Queen Type coinage continued to be struck much later under Samudragupta I and Chandragupta II to proudly celebrate his lineage descended from the powerful and respected Lichchhavi clan. The Brāhmī legend on the reverse also attests to his proud heritage: *Lichchhavayaḥ* (the Lichchhavi Clan), which also attested on the Allahabad Pillar Inscription: *Lichchhavi-dauhitra* (Son of a Lichchhavi daughter).[68] Coins struck later in his reign (Fig. 2.67), shows hints of the *Tribhaṅga s*tyle—the fluid style of the figures of the king and queen with a reverse die showing the goddess seated on a lion. Now, however, the back of the throne has finally been eliminated, thus arriving at the iconic Siṁhavāhinī design, which eventually becomes the norm.

It is only when viewing the full range of coins of the King and Queen Type that we see this important transition of design during this early part of the Gupta Era over a six-decade period, from Chandragupta I's reign to the end of Samudragupta I's reign, into the early part of Chandragupta II's rule. This period shows a slow evolution of the iconography moving away from the Kuṣāṇa-styled stiff-figure posture of the King on the obverse, the clothing, the goddess on throne etc., to a more Indianized Gupta style.

This new design is later reused on the reverse of the Lion-Slayer Type coins struck during the early phase of Chandragupta II. The imagery of the king slaying a lion with the goddess seated on a lion on the reverse had a dual meaning. While the first King and Queen Type design conveyed the *Mithuna* concept of a loving couple reinforcing a most important alliance through marriage, these Lion-Slayer Type coins projected the imagery of a powerful and valiant king who was ready to vanquish the kings of the lion territories, and by default the kings over the Gir Forest in Gujarat (i.e, the Western Kṣatrapa kings). The war campaign against the Kṣatrapas started almost immediately after Chandragupta II forcefully captured the Gupta throne by overthrowing Kāchagupta around AD 383. The powerful imagery of the Gupta king vanquishing the mighty lion of the west, helped drive home an important message, all with the divine authority and blessing of a *Siṁhavāhinī devī.*

Durgā's importance can also be seen in the naming of Chandragupta II's first son, Kumāragupta I who was named after Kārttikeya—the first son of Durgā (the same as Pārvatī, consort of Śiva). Nanā, along with Lakṣmī, can be also seen as a prominent and easily recognizable female deity featured in sculpture from that era, transitioning later to Ambika devī in Jain sculpture.

It is during the Gupta period that the full pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses start to come to the forefront, and the creation of Purānic literature further popularizes the interest in the deities for the masses. The evolution of the designs captured within these coin designs can also be seen in the sculptures, showing a gradual yet important transformation of the designs of Lakṣmī, the goddess of prosperity.

68. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 216.

2.17. The War God Kārttikeya

Unlike the Kuṣāṇas, the Gupta kings preferred to feature mostly goddesses on the reverse of their coins. There is one exception to this: Kumāragupta I's Kārttikeya Type coins, where the War God Kārttikeya is shown on the reverse sitting on his *vāhana,* the peacock. Śaiva symbology was mostly subtle and covert on the coins prior to Kumāragupta I. However, on the coins struck by Kumāragupta I and his son Skandagupta, Śaivite iconography becomes an integral part of the coin designs and for the first time in Gupta coinage: a male god figure is featured on the coins.

Figure 2.68. Kumāragupta I. Kārttikeya riding peacock, *Śakti* spear in left hand, right hand in *abhayamudrā* pose. PC, 1462.

The mythology of this warrior god Kārttikeya is quite complex and seems to have continuously evolved from the Vedic times to the Gupta era. During this period, the story of Kārttikeya changed on multiple fronts. The Vedic literature provides differing legends of his birth: such was the case even during the days of the great epic *Mahābhārata* for we read there (9, 46, 98–99): "according to some he is the Sanat-Kumāra, the first born of the creator Brahma; according to some others he is the son of Maheśvara (Rudra); according to some, he is the son of the fire-god Agnī (Vibhāvasu); others view him variously as the son of Pārvatī (Umā), of the Krttikās, or of Gangā."[69] The number six comes to be intimately associated with Kārttikeya: he was born from six sparks of fire (from *Śiva),* or from six drops of seminal fluid (of Agnī); he was suckled by six Krttikās; tended by six wives of sages *(rshi-patni),* he grew to maturity in six days, became a victor on the sixth day. He has six heads and was adopted by six malevolent deities. He had six parents: Brahmā, Rudra, Agnī, Svāhā, Gangā and Umā, and it was on the sixth lunar day that the god killed the *asura* Tāraka.[70]

The *Amarakośa* provides seventeen names for this warrior god, among them: *Skanda, Sanat-Kumāra,* Kārttikeya*, Guha, Mahāsena, Śaktidhara*, etc. On Yaudheya coins (second century AD) he is referred to as *Bhahmanya-Kumāra.* On the gold coins of Huvishka (AD 155–189) he is referred to as Skando-Komaro and Bizago (MK 166) and as Maaseno (MK 298) shown holding a rooster-topped standard (*Kukkuṭadhvaja*) in his right hand. He is also seen on Yaudheya coins from the third and fourth centuries AD. Kārttikeya holds a spear, and the legend reads *Yaudheya Ganasa Jaya*—"Hail the Republic of Yaudheyas". On these Yaudheya coins the Kārttikeya holds a *Mahā-Śakti* in his right hand, and a rooster stands by his left leg. Yaudheyas are said to be descendants of Yudhishthira and followers of *Kārttikeya.*

69. *AdiParvan* 136, 13.
70. Rao 1914: 33–46.

Figure 2.69. Yaudheya-Kārttikeya holding a spear. Third century AD. CNGI 127-39.

Figure 2.70. Kuṣāṇa, Huvishka, Kārttikeya holds a *Kukkuṭadhvaja* with his right arm. 7.93 g, 20 mm. CNG 117-382

The imagery of Kārttikeya varies prior to the Gupta period. In Gandharan and Kuṣāṇa (pre-Gupta) imagery, he is mostly always shown standing, with a *Kukkuta* (rooster) and a *Śakti* (spear). The iconography of this complex god Kārttikeya and his various forms are outlined in the Vedic and Puranic texts, and each seems to have their own definition on how to portray the deity with substantial differences between northern and southern Indian imagery.

Figure 2.71. Lead coin of Skandagupta. Obv.: Rooster facing *Mahā-Śakti* spear. Rev.: *Varṣā* 130, *Śrī Skandagupta.* 4.50 g, 16.5 mm. PC, 3494

Figure 2.72. *Kukkuta* (rooster) with *Mahā-Śakti* spear. Yaudheya, 5.57 g, 20 mm. PC.

Figure 2.73. Kārttikeya with rooster and *Śakti. Gandhara*. Second century AD. LACMA 85.279.3

2.18. ŚAKTI: THE SPEAR

The expansion of the Gupta Empire was the function of a powerful military equipped with an arsenal of weapons which the mints prominently featured on the coins. While the weapon imagery is mostly seen on gold coins, only the *Mahā-Śakti* spear is seen on the lead coins of Skandagupta. In context of Gupta numismatics, the two types of spears shown on coins are:

Figure 2.74. *Rathā-Śakti* held by the king in his right hand, while he offers oblations onto the fire altar. Samudragupta Javelin Type. King with javelin and dagger at his waist. 7.85 g, 22 mm. PC, 1004.

Figure 2.75. Chandragupta II. Lion-Slayer Type. King attacks lion with spear. 7.8 g. Coin **448**.

***Ratha-Śakti*:** Thrusting spear or javelin with a sharp spearhead on one end and a small round pommel on the opposite end. The javelin is seen depicted on the early Chandragupta I coins as well as the Javelin Type coins of Samudragupta and Lion-Slayer Type coins of Chandragupta II.[71]

***Mahā-Śakti*:** According to Beer (2003) "The *Mahā-Śakti* or 'great spear' was reputed to have been adorned with bells," a clear depiction of which can be seen on the *Aśvamedha* Type coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I. This same spear is very prominently shown on the lead coins as well as a gold seal of Skandagupta (shown on the prior page as well as under the Skandagupta coin section, p. 455). *Mahā-Śakti* also is the name of the spear Śiva gave to Kārttikeya.[72]

Figure 2.76. *Mahā-Śakti* spear with bells shown on reverse in front of the Queen. Kumāragupta I *Aśvamedha* Type. Horse to left, queen with *Chaurī* over her shoulder facing left. 8.25 g. BKB 196/118.

71. See p. 80, "The Question of a Standard vs. a Javelin vs. a Rajadaṇḍa," for a discussion on the significance of the imagery of an inverted spear on Ancient coinage.

72. Śivapurāna 2.4.5.

Figure 2.77. Royal seal of Skandagupta, Gold. *Kukkuta* (rooster) with *Mahā-Śakti* spear. PC. 5.57 g, 30 mm.

In Gupta-period sculptural art, we see mostly the popular seated form of the deity: Kārttikeya is now mostly shown as a two-armed deity seated on his *vāhana* (peacock) with his right hand held in an *abhayamudrā* pose and a *Śakti* spear in his left hand. Similar imagery is seen on the Kārttikeya Type gold coins of Kumāragupta I. The peacock also becomes the central icon during his time and is prominently featured in the designs of Kumāragupta I's gold and silver coins. It is also used extensively on the silver coins of Skandagupta and Budhagupta, as well as on seals and sealings from Gupta sites at Bhiṭā and Rajghat.[73] The rooster and the *Śakti* spear are also seen on lead coins, as well as a royal gold seal of Skandagupta illustrated above.

73. Sinha 1979: 86–87.

2.19. ŚANKA AND ŚANKANIDHI

***Śanka*:** The conch shell is the sacred emblem of Viṣṇu and is prominent in Hindu art and iconography.

> The white conch shell, which spirals towards the right in a clockwise direction, is an ancient Indian attribute of the heroic gods, whose mighty conch-shell horns proclaimed their valor and victories in war. Viṣṇu's fire-emanating conch was named *Pāñchajanya,* meaning "possessing control over the five classes of beings." Arjuna's conch was known as *Devadatta,* meaning "God-given," whose triumphant blast struck terror in the enemy. As a battle horn the conch is akin to the modem bugle, as an emblem of power, authority, and sovereignty.[74]

The *Śanka* appears on the lead coins of Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I, and Skandagupta. It is also seen as a symbol on the reverse of a gold coin of Kumāragupta I and on the *Garuḍa* Type coins, where we can see both the rare right turning conch shell (inset below), which is considered the most auspicious, as well as the left-turning common variety.

Figure 2.78. *Garuḍa* Type. *Repoussé* gold coin issued in the name of Kumāragupta I, *Śrī Mahendrādityaḥ*. *Garuḍa* holds a *chakra* as well as a right-turning conch shell. 1.3 g, 19 mm. Coin **650**.

The nine treasures of the Hindu god *Kubera* are called the *nidhi. Kubera* is the god of wealth, one of the protectors of the world (*Lokpala*). The nine treasures are: *Mahāpadma* (great lotus flower), *Padma* (lotus flower), *Śanka* (conch shell), *Mākāra* (the elephant-headed mythical fish of the river Ganges), *Kacchapa* (tortoise), *Kumuda* (precious stone), *Kuṇḍa* (jasmine flower), *Nīla* (sapphire), and *Kharva* (dwarf). Each of these, it seems, were incorporated into the designs on Gupta coins. While the *Mahāpadma, Padma, Śanka,* and *Mākāra* are obvious and easily identifiable, the rest of the *nidhis* may be part of the coin design, but not as apparent. *Kharva* (dwarf) is seen on Chhatra coins; *Kuṇḍa* (jasmine flowers) could be easily one of the flowers held by the goddess or dropped by the goddess on the reverse of the gold coins; and *Kacchapa* (tortoise) has not yet been identified but will most likely be seen on copper or lead coins. The representation of a *Śankanidhi*, a conch shell with pearls or coins flowing out of it, is seen on the Skandagupta Archer Type, Horseman Type, and Lion-Slayer Type gold coins.

74. Beer 2003.

Figure 2.79. Kumāragupta I. Elephant-Rider Type. Right turning *Śanka* (conch shell) shown on the reverse to right of the goddess. *Mahāpadma* at left of the goddess. 8.24 g, 19 mm. PC, 1199.

Figure 2.80. Skandagupta. Archer Type, Class II, Var. C. *Śankanidhi* with nine pearls flowing out. CNG 120-599.

2.20. ŚRĪVATSA

The origins of the *Śrīvatsa* symbol can be traced back to the third millennium BC, as seen on the Indus seals, pre-Mauryan terracottas and other seals. Its earliest representations can also be seen on Śuṅga art at Sāñchi, Sārnāth and Bharhut. In Hindu iconography, *Śrīvatsa* is either used as an auspicious symbol or as a distinctive mark of *a mahā-pursha-lakśaṇa* (mark of a great person). The *Śrīvatsa* symbol is seen as a mark on the breast of Viṣṇu and on Buddhist sculptures, as well as on the chest of Jain *tirthaṅkaras*. The Sanskrit term *Śrīvatsa* means the "beloved of Śri" or as Monier Williams describes it, "that which is dear to Śri." Śrī resides, according to Brahmanical mythology, on the chest of her lord, which is adorned by the auspicious marks of *Śrīvatsa* and the gem Kaustubha and her seat is *Śrīvatsa*.[75] Early sculpture was mostly symbolic and the imagery is best seen on a tiny copper image of Śrī Lakṣmī in the form of a *śrivatsa* dated to about the third century BC.

By the first century AD, the *Śrīvatsa* is seen used universally as one of the main auspicious symbols in Hindu and Buddhist imagery. In Gupta gold coins, the *Śrīvatsa* symbol is found on the obverse of the two coins shown below: Chandragupta III's heavy weight Archer Type coin with the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on obverse (PC, 1113, Coin **924-1**) and the Skandagupta Archer with *Śrīvatsa* (PC 1226, Coin **844**). It is also seen in place of the *tamghā* on the reverse of a few of Kumāragupta I's coins. We also see the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on lead coins struck in the Gujarat region during the second half of the Gupta era.

Figure 2.81. Śrī Lakṣmī. Copper. Third century BC. GMC.

Figure 2.82. Gupta era metal seal with *Śrīvatsa* and lion. *ŚriBhadrasya*. BM 1892,1103.92.

These symbols were added by the mints to the design on obverse of Gupta gold coins to easily identify coins struck with lower gold percentage.[76] It is indeed difficult to confirm whether the choice to use a *Śrīvatsa* on the obverse of these coins is a symbolic acknowledgment of the Buddhist movement that was popular during that time, or whether it was an acknowledgment of their support of the Jain sect, or their Vaiṣṇavite religion as a representation of the mark of Lord Viṣṇu or as a symbol of Śiva, as a homage to the Śaivite sect.

75. Sivaramamurthy 21: 25.
76. See the discussion covering the obverse symbols and misunderstood coinage of Chandragupta II on p. 139.

Figure 2.83. Kumāragupta I. Archer Type. *Śrīvatsa* on obverse. PC, 1175.

Figure 2.84. Skandagupta. Archer Type. *Śrīvatsa* on obverse. 9.16 g. PC, 1226.

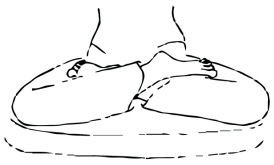
Figure 2.85. Chandragupta III. Archer Type. *Śrīvatsa* symbol on obverse. 9.08 g. PC, 1113.

A review of the inscriptions mentioning the religious donations made by the Gupta kings confirms that they were equally supportive of the brāhmaṇical, Buddhist, and Jain religious movements. The table on the following pages summarizes all Gupta inscriptions that reference religious donations.

Figure 2.86. Buddha's parasol with auspicious symbols (from l. to r.): *Chakra*, *Kalaśa*, *Padma nidhi*, lotus, begging bowl, swastika, *Śaṅkha*, lotus and *prabha*. Red sandstone. Second–third c. AD. Mathurā, UP.

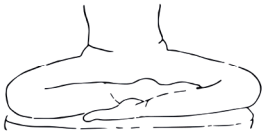
2.21. Postures and poses seen on Gupta coins

In addition to the symbols found on the coins and sculptures from this time, the Gupta art form evolved to include beautiful *asnas* (postures) when depicting the gods, goddesses, kings and queens on the coins. These designs evolved during the Gandharan and Kuṣāṇa era as seen on Buddhist sculptures and later came to be entrenched in the Gupta style by the fourth–fifth centuries AD. Some of the postures seen on coins are shown below:

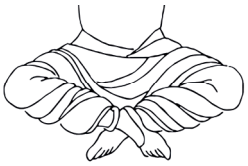


Padmāsanā (Vajraāsana)
Both legs folded, both soles face up. *Bhadrāsana*: when soles are touching.

Virāsana or
Ardhapadmāsana
Half Lotus, one leg rests on thigh, one sole faces up.

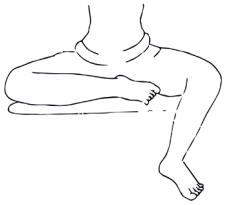


Sattvaparayaṅka
Both legs rest on the floor, one sole faces up.



Sattvāsana
Both feet crossed at ankles. Right leg is in front.

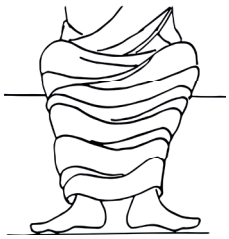
Lalitāsana
Right leg hangs down, left leg bent, folded on seat.



Vāmārdhaparyanka
Right leg bent, folded on seat, left leg hangs down. (opposite of *Lalitāsana*)

Sukhāsana
Seated figure with right elbow resting on right leg flexed up, left elbow resting on chair back. Left leg bent and rests on chair seat.

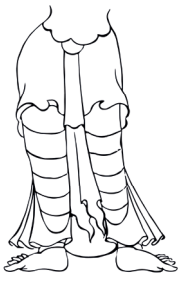
Mahārājalīlāsana
Legs apart, right leg straight and bent at knee, left leg bent on seat. Arm rests on right knee.



Paralambapāsana
Legs are straight and hanging down.

Tribhaṅgāsana
Body flexed at three points Tri bent body style, became the hall-mark of the Gupta style.

Sampādāsana
Body is straight, both feet apart and vertical.



Dvibhaṅgāsana
Body is straight, one hip slightly bent.

Notes: The postures shown above cover majority of the coins; however, for additional reference, please refer to *Reconnaître les postures, Institut d'Etudes Bouddhique*s, bouddhismes.net/postures-asana; R. S. Gupte (1972), *Iconography of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains*; John Rosenfield (YEAR), *Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*.

Varada-mudrā
The right hand faces down, palm facing outwards, depicting the benevolent nature of deities, providing charity and boons.

Abhaya-mudrā
Right hand is facing up to shoulder height, palm facing outwards. It depicts the blessings and protection from evil.

Vaiśākham
The left leg is straight and the right leg is outstretched for balance. The reverse of this pose, where the right leg is straight, is the *Maṇḍalam* pose. Coin **500**.

Ālīḍham
The right leg extends forward with the left leg back for balance, a typical posture for an Archer. The reverse pose with the left leg extended forward is *Pratyālīḍham*. Coin **504**.

Kaṭyavalambita
Hand rests on the hip in a relaxed pose. Also referred to as *Kaṭi-hasta* (hand-on-hip). Coin **681**.

Sūcīmudrā
Forefinger extended and pointing, sometimes to the object in front, below, or above. The gesture depicts admonishment or warning. Also see Coin **854** where Lakṣmī is shown with this pose.

KING SAMUDRAGUPTA I (the First) is portrayed holding an inverted spear in his left hand as he offers oblations onto the *Yajña kuṇḍa* with his right hand. Adorning his head is a crescent-topped diadem. This scene captures the *Āyudha Pūjā*, a Hindu ritual venerating weapons, also known as *Śāstrapuja*, traditionally performed before embarking on battles. This coin dates back to the first half of the fourth century AD. PC, 1020.

3. The Question of a Standard vs. a Javelin vs. a Rajadaṇḍa

A student of Gupta numismatics may have already noticed that I have strayed away from the prior classification and labels used to describe various devices seen on Gupta coins. In particular, the coins of Chandragupta I and Samudragupta I show the king holding a long, staff-like object in his left hand while offering oblations with his right hand. For over 125 years, scholars debated the identity of this device. In 1889, Vincent A. Smith referred to this device found on coins of Samudragupta as a javelin and named these coins as the Javelin or Spearman Type.[1] John Allan disagreed with Smith and stated, "The name Javelin or Spearman type applied to this type by Vincent Smith does not accurately describe the object in the king's left hand, from which the type takes its name; it is not a spear or a javelin in those specimens *on which the top is distinct*." Allan made a case that this is indeed a royal standard that the king holds as even though a spearhead is seen at the base, "this is not the way a spear would be held...," noting further, "It is evident that Samudragupta's Standard Type is a close copy of the later coins of Kushan type…".[2]

Altekar wrote that "the designation of this type is not free from difficulty."[3] He pointed out that P. L. Gupta and B. C. Chhabra have both described this is as a *rājadaṇḍa* (scepter), and then goes on to state that "no definite preference can be shown to any of the above names, because the object is not uniformly represented." To make his case, he points to a few coins that have a spearhead (pointed end of a spear), but on others it is clearly a *rājadaṇḍa.* So, he chose to use the term "Standard Type" to describe these coins, which then was adopted by scholars. More recently, Ellen Raven subscribed to identifying *all* these coins where a king holds a staff-like device as the "Scepter Type."

However, there was a flaw in Allan and Altekar's theory of the "Standard" Type as well as in Raven's theory of the "Scepter" Type. In both Allan and Altekar's cases, their reasoning was based on a very limited number of coins available for his review, not just of the Samudragupta I coins with a long staff, but more importantly those struck by Chandragupta I, also with a similar long, staff-like device. Altekar was only able to refer to one coin of this type from the specimen in the Bharat Kala Bhavan. In discounting the *Rājadaṇḍa*/Scepter designation he stated, "[the] *rājadaṇḍa* also has not a ribbon or a fillet or a flag attached to its upper half, and in majority of cases the object has a pointed end like a javelin."[4] It is apparent that he was struggling with what name to assign to this type in his new book, which he knew would be one of the most important works on Gupta numismatics. Unfortunately, he did not have the benefit of the thousands of coin images that we have today, which will help us resolve this conundrum.

1. Smith 1889: lxv.
2. Allan 1914: lxvii–lxix.
3. Altekar 1957: 41.
4. Altekar 1957: 41.

The flaw in Altekar's theory was that he viewed the entire group of coins as a single group or type. These included the coins of Samudragupta I with the staff-like device (Javelin), as well as the Chandragupta I coins with a similar staff-like device (*Rājadaṇḍa*), and in the absence of enough data, he incorrectly assigned the universal label "Standard Type" to the entire group. He, as well as the other scholars subscribing to this theory, did not understand that in fact there are *two different devices* represented on the obverse of these coins. When Altekar reviewed these coins, there was only one coin each available of Chandragupta I's *Rājadaṇḍa* Type and the King and Queen on Couch Type (where the king holds a Javelin), to study at that time. Also, on the Samudragupta I's "Standard Type" coins that Altekar did have access to, the bottom end of the staff was off the flan, i.e., the coin was not centered when struck. As such, without the pointed spearhead easily visible or sometimes partially visible, it was difficult to clearly confirm if it was just a simple staff, or a in fact a spear-like device.

When Altekar tried to disprove the suggestion that this device was indeed a javelin, he referred to three specific coins,[5] pointing out that these coins of Samudragupta did not show a pointed end. Of course, they did not show a spearhead; it was simply because the pointed spearhead was off the flan on the coins he had chosen to use as a reference. Why he used just these few Javelin Type coins instead of the vast range available to him from the Bāyāna Hoard remains unclear. So, in hindsight, Altekar was unable to correctly identify this long, staff-like object.

P. L. Gupta published a unique Gupta gold coin with the name *Chandra* under the king's arm on the obverse, where he argued that the king was "holding in the left hand a *rājadaṇḍa*."[6] However, he referred to this coin as an issue of Chandragupta II based on an incorrect reading of the legend. This reading by P. L. Gupta incorrectly assumed that the obverse legend began with the word *Śrī Deva,* and it became the sole basis for his (incorrect) attribution of the coin to Chandragupta II, which then led to a wrong conclusion. In 1949, Chhabbra published an expanded paper on the very same coin published by P. L. Gupta but reclassified it as a coin of Chandragupta I where he corrected the reading of the obverse legend on these coins as *vijitya jayati tridivaṁ prithivī śvaraḥ* ("Having conquered the globe, the lord of the earth now conquers the heavens").[7] He then tackled other key points in this overlooked and groundbreaking paper. He pointed out how the biruda *Parama bhāgavata* ("the most devout worshiper of Lord Viṣṇu") was indeed used by multiple kings over the course of the Gupta Dynasty and is in no way limited to Chandragupta II.[8] Therefore, for P. L. Gupta to base the attribution of a coin solely on the basis of such a common biruda was wrong as the biruda used by Chandragupta II was *Srī Vikramaḥ, Vikramāditvaḥ*, or variations thereof.[9] Chhabra further pointed to a lower weight of the coin and the paleography of the legend to make his case that this coin was issued earlier than those of Chandragupta II. Next, he tackled the issue of the staff in the king's right hand (the *daṇḍa),* and he went on to explain in elaborate detail as to why this device is a *Rājadaṇḍa*. "A *daṇḍa*, staff, or symbol of royal authority is also a very early conception with the Hindus, described in detail in the *smritis* and in the (ancient) works on polity (*rajniti*)." Quoting from Valmiki's chapter "*Kachchit Sarga*," he showed the use of the word *daṇḍadhara* in the *Itamayana*'s last verse.

The question on the identity of this device on Gupta coins was discussed in the first edition of this book. Using new images of coins where full spearhead is visible, comparing it to

5. Altekar 1957: PL II: 1, pp. 2–5.
6. Gupta 1947b: 146–150.
7. Chhabra 1948: 15–21.
8. See section 1.4 on birudas, pp. 28–30.
9. In 2010, I presented a paper at the Gupta conference at the University of Punjāb, Chandigarh on the same subject, making my case that these coins should be attributed to Chandragupta I.

epigraphical evidence and matching the device to sculptures, during and after the Gupta age, it was conclusively shown that such a device on the Samudragupta "Standard" type coins was in fact a javelin, an inverted spear. Therefore, this specific coin type was corrected to the "Javelin" type.

This javelin/spear device is called a *Rathā-Śakti* or a *bhindipāla*—a thrusting spear or javelin which had a sharp spearhead on one end and a small round pommel on opposite end. This exact same design is seen on coins in Fig. 3.1, A–B. In Lion-Slayer Type coins (Fig. 3.1, C), while the front of the spear is very clear, the back end is off-flan. This Lion-Slayer variety is only known from two specimens so far.

Even though Javelin Type and *Rājadaṇḍa* Type issues have been addressed in earlier papers, I find that modern scholars continue to misuse the terms and do not fully grasp the significance of the religious thought behind the iconography shown on these Gupta coins, where a king holds a javelin with spearhead facing down while offering oblations into a *Yajña kuṇḍa* fire with his right hand. This scene with an inverted javelin is shown on two Gupta coin types: the obverses of King and Queen on Couch Type and Javelin Type coins. The significance of this symbolism is further emphasized by the scene on reverses of King and Queen on Couch Type coins, which show a *Vaikuṇṭha* scene of Viṣṇu seated with his consort Lakṣmī, as described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a revered ancient text on Vaiṣṇavism, one of the main Hindu sects. To fully understand the iconography on the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coinage from, one must look to the ancient Sanskrit texts of which set the stage for the use of such a vast array of devices and design elements on these coins.

This inverted spear design has caused some confusion for scholars, and a common question posed to me in discussions is "why would they show a spear pointing down?" This is an important question and one that has yet to be answered by scholars within the context of religion *vis-à-vis* Gupta coin designs. Parallels for the same/similar designs depicting an inverted spear on other ancient coins, which continue to be found across India, evidence of brisk trade traversing across the Gupta empire via ancient routes, are discussed below. The javelin device is seen on four different Gupta coin types:

Figure 3.1. Javelin on coins struck by the Gupta dynasty.

A. Chandragupta I, King and Queen on Couch Type: the king holds an inverted spear with the left hand.
B. Samudragupta I, Javelin Type: the king holds an inverted spear with the left hand.
C. Chandragupta II, Lion-Slayer Type, Class I, Variety A: the king throws a spear with his right hand.
D. Kumāragupta I, Kārttikeya Type: the god Kārttikeya rides a peacock, *Śakti* spear in the left hand, right hand in *abhayamudrā* pose.

In Fig. 3.1 C, the spear is shown being thrown as a javelin in a dynamic portrayal, while in coin designs A, B, and D, the spear is shown held in the left hand. The pommel at the base end of the spear was a common feature seen clearly from Persia on Achaemenid reliefs. These were sometimes referred to as *kardamakes* (apple-bearers, as the round spear butt resembles an apple). On Roman spears, these are often referred to as "door-knob" spear butts (see Fig. 3.3).

3.1. The Spear on Kuṣāṇa Coins

When the first coins were issued by the Gupta king, Chandragupta I (Fig. 3.1, A), these gold coins matched not just the designs, but also the gold content and weights of the Kuṣāṇa coins already in use in this same region where the Gupta empire originated.[10] The ancient city of Mathurā, in U.P., had been used by the Kuṣāṇa kings as their winter capital and even today this region yields new Roman,[11] Kuṣāṇa, and Gupta gold coins. The mints under Kuṣāṇa kings produced innovative new designs and seem to have experimented with new ways to show the king or deity holding various objects.

In addition to a king holding a scepter, we also see a spear (shown both pointing up as well as down), goad (*aṅkuśa*), mace (*gadā*), or a trident (*triśūla*) on Kuṣāṇa coinage. A spear is clearly visible on earlier Kuṣāṇa coins, mostly on Kanishka I and Huvishka, shown with a spearhead at end of the long shaft. On some quarter-dīnāra coins of Kanishka I, spear is also shown inverted (Fig. 3.2, B). On coins struck later by Vāsishka onwards, this portraiture of a king holding a spear is mostly replaced with the king holding a scepter, or holding a trident, however, on a rare Vasudeva I coin die, we still see a spear held by the king with his left hand (Fig. 3.2, F).

Figure 3.2. Kuṣāṇa coins with spears.

A: Kanishka I, AD 127–151. Quarter-dīnāra: *upright spear* held in left hand.
B: Kanishka I. Quarter-dīnāra: *inverted spear* held in left hand.
C: Kanishka I. Dīnāra: upright spear held by left hand.
D: Huvishka, AD 151–190. Dīnāra: upright spear held in right hand, goad in left hand.
E: Huvishka. Dīnāra: upright spear held in left hand.
F: Vasudeva I, AD 190–230. Dīnāra: upright spear.

10. Kumar, *op.cit.*, p. 75.
11. Paula J. Turner (1989). *Roman Coins from India*. University College London Institute of Arch. Publication, p. 14.

3.2. The Inverted Spear on Greek and Roman Coins

Prior to Kuṣāṇa dynasty, the representation of a king holding a weapon such as a spear goes back to the earliest coins struck in antiquity. The concept of depicting an inverted spear on coinage was not an innovation for the Gupta mints as this was a common feature also seen on Roman coins coming to India through regular trade. This inverted spear design shows up in Asia minor even prior to Roman coins as is seen on coins struck by Idrieus (Fig. 3.3, A), which portrays Zeus carrying a both a battle-axe (Greek: *Labrys*) as well as an inverted spear.[12] The Achaemenid Empire at one time stretched up to and included Gandharan and Taxila region.

Roman trade was very brisk with India as Indian animals, gems, incense, perfumes, and spices were sought-after items in Rome. As a result of this robust trade, Roman coins and hoards have been reported across India, from Mahārāṣṭra and Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh to Mathurā[13] in western and central India. Most of the roman coin hoards are found in eastern and southern India. The eastern seacoast and the region across present-day Andhra Pradesh, along the banks of the Krishna River seems to be also very rich with such coin finds. The region around the eastern coastal ports were important Roman trading stations, and we do have confirmation that Samudragupta I conquered this region and brought the kingdoms of Dakṣiṇapatha within his empire, as referenced in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Trade routes crisscrossed though Ujjain, the Narmada valley and the Deccan, while the western routes connected Eastern Malwa, and Vidiśā connected the ancient port of Bharukachchha and Suppāraka to Mathurā via Ujjain.[14]

In Roman times, an inverted spear was quite common across gold, silver, and bronze coinage. It was shown on both obverse and reverse with either the emperor and/or a deity holding an inverted spear.[15] In fact, coins struck for Septimius Severus shows the king standing with an inverted spear in front of altar (Fig. 3.3, E), very much like the design of Samudragupta I's Javelin Type coins. It is also very important to note here that Roman coins are still found all over India including coins issued by Septimius Severus. In recent times, a finger ring seal (Fig. 3.3, F) was found in Gujarat, India, in the village of Una, near the port island of Diu, which featured the likeness of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus and the title of the local administrative official, in Kuṣāṇa Brahami script.[16]

The fourth century AD saw a massive revival of Hindu religious brāhmaṇical Vedic practices sweep across India. This religious movement is captured on the obverse and reverse designs of the King and Queen on Couch Type struck by Chandragupta I, and the Javelin Type struck by his son Samudragupta I, both of which portray a very important Hindu Vedic religious ceremony. In fact, most of the coin designs seen on Gupta gold coinage has religious connotations mirroring the religious movement permeating through this land during early fourth and fifth centuries AD. Śaivite, Vaiṣṇavite, Buddhist, and Jain iconography and symbols and iconography are clearly visible across Gupta coin designs.[17]

12. Samudragupta I issued both a Battle-Axe Type and the Javelin Type. Kumar, *op.cit.*, pp. 206–11. This is not to suggest that somehow this coin type made its way to India, rather that the battle-axe was on coins has been depicted prior to Gupta coinage.

13. Paula J. Turner 1989. *Roman Coins from India* (University College London Inst Arch Pub.), p. 119.

14. B. C. Chhabra and G. S. Gai, eds. 1981. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* vol. 3 (Delhi), pp. 203–08. Also see Falk 2019, *Kuṣāṇa Religion and Politics*, p. 6: Falk discusses Roman coins found in Swat Valley and such designs serving as prototypes for Kuṣāṇa coinage.

15. For example, see Tiberius (AD 14–37); Hadrian (AD 119–125); Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161AD); Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180); Commodus (AD 177–192); Septimius Severus (AD 193–211); Geta (AD 209–211); Caracalla (AD 198–217); Phillip II as Caesar (AD 244–247); Maximianus (AD 286–305); Theodosius (AD 379–395).

16. CNG Triton XI – 953. Gold Ring seal of *Dhanguptasya*, who must have been a trade representative for Rome or trader with high-level affiliation with Septimius Serverus, but so far remains unidentified; found in Gujarat, India.

17. Kumar, *op.cit*., pp. 37–51, Ch. 6: Evolution of Design and symbols on Gupta coins.

Figure 3.3. Inverted spear on Greek and Roman coins.

A. Greek, Satraps of Caria, Idrieus, 351/0–344/3 BC: inverted spear with round pommel.
B. Roman, Tiberius, AD 14–37: inverted spear with round pommel.
C. Roman, Caracalla, AD 198–217: inverted spear with round pommel.
D. Roman, Septimius Severus, AD 193–211: inverted spear with round pommel.
E. Roman, Septimius Severus holds inverted spear with pommel at altar.
F. Gold intaglio ring with busts of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna found in Gujarat, with Gupta Brāhmī legend "*Dāmāputrasya Dhanaguptasya*" ([Seal of] Dhangupta son of Dama).

3.3. The Inverted Spear on Gupta Coins

The amalgamation of the iconography of Rudra, Śiva, Vāyu, and Indra which started with Kuṣāṇa coin designs, developed further under the Gupta mints which took this a step further and added elements from their Vaiṣṇavite faith. While many Kuṣāṇa coins tend to feature a *triśūla* (Trident)—a Śaivite attribute for Śiva, on Gupta coins the *triśūla* was replaced by a *Garuḍa* on a stand, a *Garuḍadhvaja* which is a Vaiṣṇavite attribute of Viṣṇu.[18] Similarly, the design of goddess Ardokṣo, which was a codified design on reverse of later Kuṣāṇa coins, which gets eventually replaced by the Hindu goddess Lakṣmī (Viṣṇu's consort) as the primary deity and design on reverse for majority of the Gupta gold coins.[19]

On two Gupta coin types (Fig. 3.1, A–B), the king is shown holding an inverted spear only with his left hand, with the spearpoint touching the ground. In addition to the imagery of an inverted spear held by left hand on the first two coins, we also see the king performing a *homa* with his right hand, a primary religious ritual in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. In this ceremony oblations are offered into a consecrated holy fire held in a *Yajña kuṇḍa*. On the Lion-Slayer Type coin (Fig. 3.1, C), the king is shown attacking the lion with a spear held in his right hand and not the left hand. Why was his imagery depicted on coins in this manner? Why was the javelin held inverted in one scene,

18. Kumar, *op.cit.*, p. 37. See discussion on crescent-topped standard and *Śaivite* iconography on Gupta coins.
19. Kumar, *op.cit.*, pp. 154–57.

only held by the left hand, versus the depiction of a weapon only held by the right hand in hunting scene? The answer lies in our Vedic texts which are consistent on preference of the right hand as holy and pure, the hand of action.

This imagery of performing religious rites, holding weapons, benediction, or similar purposes was derived from the rules and rituals prescribed in these ancient Vedic texts. In Hindu ceremonies, all religious rites are performed with the right hand only. Oblations into the *Yajña kuṇḍa* are thrown with the right hand only. At marriage, the bride's right hand is placed in the right hand of the groom, and they both take their first step together with only the right foot.

In Hinduism, the right hand is the hand of purity and action, and the left hand holds items consecrated to God: "The gifts are expected to be presented with the right hand (*Rigveda Samhità* 8, 81, 1; 10, 180, 1) and it is there that they are held in readiness (1, 128, 6). *Rigveda Samhità* 8, 81, 6: Indra is requested to bring something to those speaking with his right hand but to grasp or seize it with the left hand only, reminds us of the ritual custom of Hindus as well as their Vedic ancestors to hold the sacrificial gifts or consecrated material in their left hand (which is not used in worshipping the gods) before offering or applying them with their right hand. Vedic text (*Śathpatha Brāhamana* I, 1, 3, 7.) from which it appears that in sacrificing to the gods the sacrificial material is taken in the left hand but dispensed with the right."[20]

Jan Gonda[21] explained the importance given to the right versus the left as understood by the Vedic man:

> A mythological explanation in the form of a reference to Prajapati's creative activity is given in *Kathak Samhità* 9, II: 112, 18 f. : the creator god created the gods (*deva*) with his right, the anti-gods (*asura*) with his left hand.
>
> The *vajra*, i.e. the so-called thunderbolt weapon, is—like our swords etc.—said to be placed aside or to rest on the left and to be hurled away on the right (with the right hand): *Kathak Samhità* 21, 2 38, 5 f.; *Kätyäyanarautasutra* 31, 17: 164, 14. Accordingly, while creating various creatures Prajapati, to the accompaniment of a formula containing the name of Indra (the god who wields the *vajra* weapon), fastened the *vajra* on his right side, for victory (*Taittiriya Samhità* 5, 3, 6, 2). It is therefore not surprising to read that with the right hand a weapon is taken (*Rigveda Samhità* 6, 18, 9) or wielded (*Rigveda Samhità* 6, 22, 9) and an enemy slain (*Rigveda Samhità* 8, 2, 32).[22]
>
> Various ritual acts should be performed while standing to the right side of a sacred object: *Kashyap Samhità*: Ch. 68."[23]
>
> The Indian teacher, whilst initiating a pupil, laid his right hand on him to become "pregnant" with him, so that on the third day the youth could be born as a Brāhmīn (*Śathpatha Brāhamana* 11, 5, 4, 12) . According to *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 1, 2, 5, 21the pupil should salute his teacher by striking the latter's right foot with his right hand.[24]

These ancient Vedic texts laid down the rules, which were also followed strictly by the mints when creating these Vedas-inspired designs for the Gupta gold coins. The right hand and left hand

20. J. Gonda (1972).
21. Gonda, *op.cit.,* p. 4.
22. Gonda, *op.cit.,* p. 5.
23. Gonda, *op.cit.,* p. 19, n. 6.
24. Gonda, *op.cit.,* p. 11.

held had different function and significance in religious imagery. To better understand the imagery of an inverted spear, we must once again refer to the Vedic texts: the Vedic ceremony of a king holding an inverted spear is the depiction of *Āyudha Pūjā*—a Hindu ceremony worshipping the weapons (also referred to as *Śāstrapuja*). *Āyudha* in Sanskrit means "weapons" and *Śāstra* refers to the "practice or the rules or treatise."

The *Āyudha Pūjā,* the worship of weapons based on established Vedic rules was a common practice prior to an important battle or a military campaign in ancient India. Thomas and Geraci[25] confirm:

> The practice of honoring weapons and other implements has a long tradition in India, one that stretches back as far as the Vedas. A. A. MacDonell notes that the *Rig Veda* includes passages that invoke, praise, or even deify tools, from weapons to ploughshares (1897, 155) and H. J. Rose subsequently took this as evidence that Āyudha Puja, itself, is as old as that text (1913, 236). For Rose, this indicates a process in the history of religions in which arose deities designated to specific tasks; and he goes on to argue that it could indicate that similar practices of tool or weapon worship operated in ancient Italy, and that these were replaced by worship of gods that represented the functions of the tools.

In present-day India, the *Āyudha Pūjā* is celebrated on the ninth day of the Navratri festival and on this day the tools of the trade, the instruments of the craftsman, and the weapons of the warrior, are cleaned and worshipped. In Vasiṣṭha's *Dhanurvedasamahita*, rules are laid down for the purification ceremony for the weapons. It provides guidance on the hymns to be chanted for purification of each of the weapons.[26]

Sreenivasa Rao[27] while discussing temple architecture and imagery explains:

> *Āyudha* generally translates to weapons; but, in *shilpa-Śastra*, the term indicates whatever objects the idol holds in his or her hands. The *Āyudhas* delineate the nature, character and functions associated with the idol. In a way of speaking, they are the symbols of a symbolism. For instance, Saraswathi holds in her hands a book symbolizing the Vedas and learning; a *Kamaṇḍalu* (a water pot) symbolizing *smruthi*, *vedanga* and *shastras*; a rosary symbolizing the cyclical nature of time; and the musical instrument *veena* symbolizing music and her benevolent nature.
>
> All these objects are not weapons in the conventional sense, but the *shilpa* employs those as symbols to expand and depict and interpret the nature of the idol and its meaning. Each of these *Āyudhas* signifies a certain aspect or it stands for a concept. For instance, the mirror signifies a clear mind and awareness; the flag signifies victory or celebration; the *aṅkuśa* (goad) signifies exercising control over senses and baser instincts, *Ḍamaru*, in the hands of *Shiva* signifies creation and origin of sound and learning; and the scepter (*daṇḍa*) signifies authority and rule of law.

Śilpa-Śastra in Sanskrit translates into "the science of arts and crafts" and was a term used in Hindu texts to document the codified rules and principles to be employed by craftsmen when

25. Renny Thomas and Robert M. Geraci 2018. "Religious rites and scientific communities: Āyudha Puja as 'Culture' at the Indian Institute of Science," *Zygon* 53: 108.

26. Vasiṣṭha's *Dhanurvedasamahita*, p. 47. Translated 2003 by Purnima Roy, JJ Publishing House, Delhi.

27. Sreenivasaraos.com: "*Temple Architecture—Devalya Vastu*," Part 7 of 9. Accessed June 2020.

Figure 3.4. Archer Type coins show King performing *Āyudha Pūjā* ceremony and King holding arrow with right hand.

creating temples and sculptures of deities. It was these codified rules for design, a design manual for attributes, proportions of the sculptured figures for each of the numerous Hindu gods and goddesses, ceremonies, temple architecture and art; and the mint craftsmen were aware of and mindful of such rules when creating coin designs for the Gupta kings. Following such rules, the mints ensure that *the use of right hand for benediction or offering oblations was consistently used on Gupta coinage*, whereas the weapons were shown held by either hand, depending on the scene portrayed, militaristic vs. religious. On the Lion-Slayer Type Class I coins, Fig. 3.1, C, the king is throwing a *javelin* with his right hand in a hunting scene and similarly Class II coins, Chandragupta II is shown killing a lion with a sword also held in his right hand.

On Archer Type coins of Chandragupta II, Class I (Fig. 3.4), we see a unique design where the king drops oblations into an *Agnī kuṇḍa* or a *Yajña kuṇḍa* with his right hand, while holding a bow with his left hand, a religious scene depicting the *Āyudha Pūjā* ceremony, like the scene depicted on the Javelin Type coins of Samudragupta I. This design of the king dropping oblations from his right hand into a *Yajña kuṇḍa*, into a design showing the king holding an arrow is the transformation from a religious message to an action message. The first scene is all about portraying a king who is pious and upholds religious virtues, while the second scene is all about showing that the king is ready for battle: an action scene.

Under Samudragupta I, the Javelin Type coins were struck early in his reign. This was the expansionist phase of his reign when he focused all his resources on expanding the empire. During this time of war and military advances, his gold coins show designs that served with as a warning to the opposing kings—the Battle-Axe Type coins feature an obverse legend which clearly warns the other kings to stand down: *Kṛitāntaparaśur jayatyajita rājajetāʼjitaḥ* ("Victorious is the conqueror of unconquered Kings, himself invincible as a veritable battle-axe of the god of death").[28] This critical phase which led to his expanding the empire and conquering most of north and central India, is why we see *Āyudha Pūjā* scene with an inverted javelin is depicted so vividly on his gold coins.

3.4. Rājadaṇḍa—The Scepter

In Gupta coinage, a scepter is called the *Rājadaṇḍa* Type (Fig. 3.5, E–F). The differences between a scepter and a javelin are starkly clear and each serves different functions: the scepter is a symbol of royal authority, while a spear/javelin is a weapon. *On Gupta gold coins, a scepter is always shown as a long staff with a round pommel at each end*. This use of a pommel at each end is an easy way

28. On this type we see the battle-axe held both with the left hand (Class I) and by the right hand (Class II). Class I coins are the most numerous, while the Class II is known only by seven specimen, pointing to a preference by the mints to strike more coins which met the rules. It is also very possible that the Class II coins were struck as part of a religious ceremony on the battlefield and hence that design was sanctioned showing the king holding the battle-axe with his right hand. Also, see discussion on *Aśvamedha* Type (horse sacrifice) coins issued by Samudragupta I, Kumar, *op.cit.,* pp. 55–59.

Figure 3.5. Scepter on Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coins.[29]

A. Huvishka, AD 151–190[30]: to left, the king holds a mace in his right hand; the left hand holds an ornamental scepter, no pennons.[31]
B. Huvishka: to right, the king holds a mace in his right hand;[32] his left hand holds an ornamental scepter with pennons.
C. Kanishka II, AD 230–247: the king drops oblations into a *Yajña kuṇḍa* and holds a scepter with a single round pommel at the top of a long staff and pennons with his left hand. *Triśūla* (trident) at left.
D. Vasudeva II, AD 267–300: the king drops oblations into a *Yajña kuṇḍa* and holds a scepter with two round pommels at the top of a long staff and pennons with his left hand. *Triśūla* (trident) at left.
E. Chandragupta I, AD 319–343, *Rājadaṇḍa* (scepter) Type: the king drops oblations into a *Yajña kuṇḍa* with his right hand and holds a scepter with a round pommel at each end of a long staff in his left hand. *Garuḍadhvaja* in front of king to his right.
F. Tribal issue from Punjāb region, in name of Samudragupta I, c. AD 344: the king drops oblations into a *Yajña kuṇḍa* with his right hand and holds a scepter with a round pommel at each end of long staff in his left hand. *Triśūla* (trident) in front of the king to his right.
G. Chandragupta II, lead coin: the king holds a scepter in his left hand. Scepter has a round pommel at each end.

to differentiate between it and a javelin, which has a spearhead at only one end. Understandably, such variations can be quite confusing for a casual reader; however, scholars and researchers must work diligently to correctly identify such devices: spear, scepter, etc. It is also very important that correct labels are used for Gupta coinage. The Javelin Type and *Rājadaṇḍa* Type are both uniquely different types and cannot be confused with one another. The use of the erroneous catch-all label—"Standard" type is inherently wrong. In many of the older catalog descriptions these terms are used interchangeably, and if scholars continue to use the old catalog labels, rather than the updated correct labels, it only leads to continued confusion for the reader.

29. Fig. 3.5, A. CNG Triton XVII-469, B. NOMOS 12-35. C. CNG Mail 81-724, D. CNG Mail 81-784, E. Tody-55-11, F. NY XXX-491, G. PC coin no. 3000. This lead coin was struck by Chandragupta II at the start of the conquest of Western Kṣatrapas and its reverse shows the three arched hills (symbol of the Kṣatrapas) instead of a *Garuḍa*, which was the imperial symbol of the Gupta dynasty. Subsequent issues in lead firmly establish the date of Gupta Era (GE) 81 (AD 400) as the time at which Chandragupta II had at least some part of WK territory under his control.

30. All Kuṣāṇa dates are from Jongeward and Cribb 2015, *Kushan, Kushano-Sasanian, and Kidarite Coins*. New York: American Numismatic Society, p. 4. Dates for Roman and Greek coins are as per auction catalog data.

31. Harry Falk 2019. "Kushan Religion and Politics," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, p. 40.

32. Falk, 2019: 141.

Figure 3.6. Scepter on Roman coins.[33]

A. Caracalla, AD 198–217, reverse: holds globe in right hand, cradles a scepter with a pommel at each end with his left hand.
B. Constantius II, AD 324–337, reverse: king in military attire places his right hand on a military trophy; his left hand cradles a sceptre with two pommels at each end.
C. Constantius Chlorus and Galerius, AD 293, medallion 10 aurei: both emperors hold a scepter in their left hands, offering libation on a tripod altar. Two military standards in central background.
D. Diocletian, AD 284–305, medallion 10 aurei, reverse: Jupiter holds a scepter with a pommel at each end, with his left hand; his right hand holds a thunderbolt. Eagle at left holding wreath.

A scepter is depicted on Kuṣāṇa coins as a long staff with one or two round pommel at the top (Fig. 3.5, C–D), and on a few rare dies it is seen as an ornamented scepter (Fig. 3.5, A–B). On coins of Vāsishka onwards, we see the scepter shown with two or three round pommels only at the top end of the staff. On reverse of Kanishka I and Huvishka coins, a scepter is held by a deity.[34] Pennons were not consistently shown, sometimes they accompany spear, or scepter and other times were missing from the designs.

On Roman coins however, the scepter was also shown with a pommel at each end (Fig. 3.6). Consistent with ancient conventions, *Roman kings and deity were always shown holding a scepter with their left hand only*, while the right hand is shown for benediction or religious function/ceremony.

On Kuṣāṇo-Sasanian coinage, we see similar congruity for the scepter held only by the left hand. On both bronze coins above (Fig. 3.7 A, D), *the deity holds a scepter with left hand only*. Similarly on the reverse of coins struck by Hormizd I in silver, the investiture scene on the reverse depicts goddess Anāhitā holding a scepter in her left hand.[35] These two coins also diverge from earlier convention in design of reverse, where we see the king using his left hand for benediction (Fig. 3.7 B, C), a feature not seen on Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coins. Such a benediction design—*abhayamudrā* pose—is commonly seen on Gandharan Buddhas and other deities from the region[36] and was shown with the right hand only. On Class I coins of Kārttikeya Type struck for Kumāragupta I, we see the king feeding grapes to

33. Fig. 3.7: A. Heritage 3032-23622, B. Triton XVIII-1248, C. ANS1944.100.63131, D. Triton XXVI-830.
34. Huvishka/Mao: Göbl 148; Miiro: Göbl 171.
35. Triton IX, 1239.
36. J. G. William 1982. *The Art of Gupta India Empire and Province.* Princeton University Press. Fig. 31: Kauśāmbī, Śiva and Pārvatī, fifth century CE; fig. 54: Pawaya Viṣṇu; fig. 61: Mathurā Govindnagar Buddha.

Figure 3.7. *Triśūla* and scepter on Kuṣāṇo-Sasanian coins.[37]

A. Ardeshir I, AD 260–290, reverse: a deity holds a scepter with roundel at each end in the left hand; diadem in right hand.
B. Ohrmazd (Hormizd) II, AD 300–303, investiture issue, reverse: seated goddess with investiture wreath in her right hand; holds scepter in left hand.
C. Ohrmazd (Hormizd) II, AD 300–303, investiture issue, reverse: seated goddess Anāhitā holds investiture wreath in her right hand and a scepter in her left hand.
D. Peroz II, AD 325–330, reverse: a deity holds a scepter with roundels in the left hand; diadem in right hand.

a peacock with his right hand, but on Class II coins, the right hand of the king is shown in a benediction pose. On the reverse, the god Kārttikeya holds out his right hand in a similar benediction pose (Fig. 3.1, D). Such symbolism within the complex designs on coins continued to evolve from Kuṣāṇa to the Gupta era. Mints under Gupta emperors became masters of design and continued to innovate with new unique designs on their new coinage, using iconography based on renewed emphasis on the revival of Hinduism under Samudragupta I. While at the start of the Gupta era (AD 319), initial coin designs mirrored Kuṣāṇa coinage, eventually Gupta mints created their own unique styles.

For a currency to be accepted and be viable for trade, trust is very important. Continuity of familiar designs from existing or prior coinage helps. As new lands were conquered, coin imagery continued to evolve and incorporated familiar design elements from newly conquered lands. We see this throughout history, especially with Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coinage. When Chandragupta II finally conquered parts of the lands under the Western Kṣatrapa rule, new silver and lead coins were issued for that region by the Gupta mints, mirroring the prolific Kṣatrapa silver currency.

This move from a Greco-Roman-*Śaivite* iconographic mindset to Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite is seen throughout the Gupta dynasty, starting from Samudragupta I up to coins issued by Skandagupta. Cribb also notes, "the Kuṣāṇa perception of the difference between the Hindu Shaivite and Vaiṣṇavite deities does not seem as polarized as the perception of later Indian worshippers."[38]

37. Fig. 3.7: A. zeno.ru 221265. B. zeno.ru 114369. C. CNG Triton XXV-621, D. CNG Triton XXV-633. Anāhitā holds a scepter in left hand per auction description, double-struck. Also, see Fabrizio Sinisi 2015, "The Deities on the Kushan-Sasanian Coins," *Electrum* 22: 201–25, for a detailed discussion on iconographic elements.

38. J. Cribb 1997. "Shiva Images on Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian Coins." In K. Tanabe, J. Cribb and H. Wang (eds.), pp. 11–66, *Studies in Silk Road Coins and Culture: Papers in Honour of Professor Iko Hirayama on his 65th Birthday* .

Transition from imagery seen on Kuṣāṇa gold and bronze coins to a new Gupta currency required familiar design elements for this new currency to be accepted. Śiva's attributes —crescent-topped *Chandradhvaja* as seen on Gupta coins of the King and Queen Type, the Battle-Axe Type, and the Tiger-Slayer Type coins, a *Jaṭā-Mukuṭa*[39] seen on the Javelin Type in combination with Vaiṣṇavite design elements such as a *Garuḍadhvaja*—Viṣṇu's *Garuḍa* eagle seated on a pedestal. This is followed by the evolution and codification of the design for goddess Lakṣmī seated on a lotus, one of the most fascinating and important iconographic evolutions captured on these early Gupta coins. All these transformations took place during this Golden Age of the Gupta dynasty.

To summarize:

1. While Roman coins do feature a military standard, the javelin and a *Rājadaṇḍa*/scepter are uniquely different devices from the military standard and cannot be labeled as a "Standard" on Gupta coins. The *Garuḍadhvaja, Chandradhvaja*, or *Chakradhvaja* devices seen on the Gupta coins are each uniquely different and cannot be grouped under a solitary catch-all "Standard Type" label.
2. The inverted javelin was a common design found on Greek, Roman, Kuṣāṇa, and Kuṣāṇao-Sasanian coinage, which preceded the Gupta designs. The imagery of an inverted javelin on Gupta gold coins has deep significance in Vedic Hinduism. The javelin spear (*Rathā-Śakti*) is also a uniquely different device than a scepter and cannot be referred to as a scepter.
3. On Gupta coins, a weapon such as an inverted javelin is held only with the left hand while performing *Āyudha Pūjā*, a religious ceremony of tools and weapons.
4. The *Rājadaṇḍa* (scepter) is not a javelin, and unlike the javelin, a *Rājadaṇḍa* is only depicted as held by the left hand on coins. This scepter device is uniquely different from a military standard and is a symbol of royal authority and should never be confused with a javelin.

Kamakura 1997. This paper has an excellent discussion on the amalgamation and parallels seen of iconographic elements which appear on Kuṣāṇa coinage from the Rudra-Śiva-Vāyu-Indra-Wesho elements and other Greek, Roman, and Iranian deities from the Silk Road culture.

39. *Jaṭā-Mukuṭa*: hair rolled up like a crown, a *Śaivite* attribute.

KING KUMĀRAGUPTA I is shown riding his majestic elephant. The ancient trade routes were used not just for trade, but also for the royal entourage and armies, as they traveled across the empire to secure and conquer new territories. The king bedecked with jewels is shown seated at front with an attendant seated behind, holding a parasol over the king. This coin was issued in the first half of the fifth century AD. PC, 1199.

4. Historical Trade Routes Crisscrossing Ancient India

Ancient land and trade routes served as conduits for trade in essentials as well as highly sought-after luxurious commodities like silk, wool, spices, and gold and precious gems. Traders, merchants, and their caravans also were sources of new ideas, religion, scientific discoveries, culture, and news. These routes were active throughout antiquity. Regional powers vied for control over the key routes to ensure a smooth flow of trade.

The trans-Iranian route from Balkh to Taxila, through Kandahar via Multan and from Herat led the caravans into India. The routes from Peshawar and Sindh followed the rivers of Punjāb through the major trade centers of that time: Attock, Rohtak, Pathankot, Mathurā, Hastinapura, Rajagriha, Ayodhyā, Pāṭaliputra, and Ukkachela-Sonpur (Bihar). The route connecting Śrāvasti, the capital of Kosala, to Rajagriha passed through Vaiśālī. Major trade also traveled through each of the rivers of Gaṅgā, Yamuna, and their tributaries. From the southern gate of the city of Balkh the Grand Route proceeded to India. After crossing the Hindukush and the Indus it joined at Taxila. The great interior route is now known as the Grand Trunk Road. Bifurcating at Mathurā, one branch proceeded to Pāṭaliputra (Palibothra-Patna) and then to the port of Tāmralipti (Tamluk); and the other proceeded to Ujjayinī (Ozene-Ujjain) and then to Bharukachchha (Barygaza-Bharuch) on the Gulf of Cambay, thus opening the interior of India for the sea trade.[1] The sector of the Grand Route from Balkh to Taxila was known to Kauṭilya as *Haimavatapatha.* It is evident from an inscription at Sānchī that the Buddhist monk Kassapogota used this route for preaching Buddhism in the Himalayas.[2] This Grand Route from Taxila proceeded towards *Kāśī* (Vārāṇasī) in the east and then to Mithilā.

On the Grand Route between east and west, Vārāṇasī was a great Commercial city.[3] Commercially the city was connected with Gandhara and Taxila.[4] It received horses and donkeys from the routes proceeding to Sovīra. Vārāṇasī had commercial relations with Chedi (Bundelkhand) and Ujjain through Kauśāmbī. From here one route proceeded to Rājagṛiha and the second to Śrāvasti. The route to Śrāvasti proceeded by Kīṭagiri. FromVārāṇasī the Grand Route reached Indraprashtha through the cities of Ukkachela (Sonpur, Bihar), Vaiśālī (Basarh, Muzaffarpur District) and Uruvelā (Gayā District). The route between Śrāvasti (Saheth Maheth) and Rājagṛiha passed through Vaiśālī. The following stages between Śrāvasti and Rājagṛiha are mentioned in the *Paryāṇavagga*: Setavyā (Capital of Keyaiaḍḍha), Kapilavastu, Kuśinārā, Pāvāpura (assumed to be village Papuar in Padrauna Tehsil in Gorakhpur District) and Bhoganagara. From Śrāvasti one route proceeded towards Kauśāmbi through Sāketa.[5]

Another description of the Grand Route started from Taxila, came to Sākala and Pathankot and then Rohtak. From here it divided in the plains of Panipat. The southern route passed through Thūṇā (Thanesar), Indraprastha, Mathurā, Soron, Kampila, Saṅkissa, and Kaṇṇakujja, reaching

1. Chandra 1977: 5.
2. John Marshall and A. Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi,* vol. 1, pp. 291–92. 1917.
3. *Jataka* IV: 405; Gatha 244.
4. *Dhammapada Atthakathā* I: 123.
5. *ibid*: 17

Arwal. The route following the right bank of the Gaṅgā crossed the river at Prayāga and then Kāśī (Banaras). Near Prayāga, one route starting from Kauśāmbī proceeded to Śrāvasti, northeast to Ukkachela (Sonpur) and from there to Vaiśālī where it met the northern route. The northern route passed through Ambala and reached Hastinapura. From there it passed through Sāketa, then proceeded to the great commercial city of Champā, Kajaṅgala (Kānkjol, Rajmahal, Bihar), and from there it entered Bengal and proceeded to the port of Tāmralipti (Tamluk).[6]

The *Jātakas* tell us that the Grand Route between Kāśī (Vārāṇasī) and Taxila passed through very dense forests, which were infested with highwaymen and wild beasts. Taxila in those days was the meeting point of Indian and foreign commerce. Buddhist literature informs us that merchants of Vārāṇasī, Śrāvasti, and Soreyya (Soron) went to Taxila for trade.[7] The *Vinaya* informs us that Jīvaka Kumāra-Bhṛitya, the great physician and a contemporary of the Buddha, proceeded from Taxila passed Bhadramkara, Udumbara, and Rohītaka to reach Mathurā. Jean Przyluski has identified Bhadramkara with the Sialkot region, Udumbara with the region of Pathankot, and Rohītaka with modem Rohtak in the Haryana. The Chinese traveler Tche-Mang also mentions Agrodaka on this route, which could be identified with Agroha in the Rohtak District.[8]

Buddhist literature gives an account of the route from Mathurā to Rajagriha in Bihar. From Mathurā this route passed to Berañjā, Soreyya, Saṅkissa, Kaṇṇakujja, and finally reached Payāgatittha. Here, crossing the Gaṅgā, it reached Kāśī (Vārāṇasī). On the same route were situated Vārāṇa (Baran-Bulundshahar) and Aḷavī (Arwal).[9] The monk Revata started from Soreyya on his way to Sahajāti (Bhiṭā, Allahabad District) passed Saṅkissa, Kaṇṇakujja, Udumbara, and Aggalapura. Kauśāmbī was the chief encampment of caravans and the routes from here to Kosala and Māgadha were largely frequented by merchants and travelers.[10] The route to the Deccan from here passed through Mahishmatī.[11]

Fa-Hien (ca. AD 400) and Song Yun (ca. AD 521) entered India through Uḍḍiyāna, but Hiuen Tsang took a route directly from Balkh to Taxila. When coming back he returned via Kandahar. Hiuen Tsang, passing Balkh, Kāpiśī, Nagarahāra, Purushapura, Pushkarāvatī, and Udabhāṇḍa reached Taxila. He traveled to the following cities: Sthāṇviśvara (Thanesar) Su-Li-Kien, Matipura (in Rohilkhand), Govishāṇa (Kashipur, Kumaon), Ahichchhatra, Vilashanā (Atranjikhera, Etah, Uttar Pradesh), Saṅkissa or Saṅkāśya, Kānyakubja, Ayodhyā, Ayamakha, Prayāga, Viśoka (perhaps Lucknow district), Kannauj, Kapilavastu, Lumbini, Rāmgrāma, and Kuśinārā. The Chinese pilgrims' various accounts have varying information on their routes which seemed to be continually changing—sometimes they took the northern routes and other times the southern routes to reach Prayāga. The surviving accounts of these Chinese pilgrims confirms that even in the sixth–seventh centuries AD the primary routes of travel remained the same as those in the accounts of the routes from the fifth century BC. There are similar accounts of the routes through Ujjain, the Narmada Valley, and the Deccan. The western routes connecting Eastern Malwa, Vidiśha connected the ancient port of Bharukachchha and Suppāraka to Mathurā via Ujjain. The Mathurā Agra route, following the upper Chambal Valley, proceeded to Ujjain and from there to the Narmada Valley.[12] The conquest and control over of this strategically important western and central region provided continual and open access to the ports on the Arabian Sea for trade with Rome, and maintaining this control of these major trade routes was critical for success of the Gupta economy.

6. *ibid*: 18.
7. Malalasekara 1957, Dictionary of Pali Proper names, Vol 1: 982. London.
8. Tche-Mang 1926: 3–17.
9. Vinaya Texts III: 2.
10. Vinaya Texts I: 277.
11. Chandra 1977: 16.
12. *ibid*: 20.

Map. 4.1. Ancient cities, trade routes, and ports.

4.1. Find Spots and Hoards of Gupta Gold Coins

One of the most important hoards of Gupta gold coins was discovered by chance by three village boys who were foraging for empty shell casings behind the hunting party of the *Mahārāja* of Bharatpur, who had participated in a hunt earlier that day on February 17, 1946. The hoard was found buried in a short embankment in the village of Hullanpura (or Nagla Chella as it was known at that time) in the district of Bāyāna, Rajasthan. The boys had spotted the edge of a metal pot that, upon further investigation, was found to contain what they thought initially were copper buttons but turned out to be ca. 2,100 coins. By the time the authorities had secured the hoard for the *Mahārāja*, approximately 285 coins were believed to have been distributed, melted down, and made into ornaments by the villagers. The balance of 1,821 coins became the property of the *Mahārāja* of Bharatpur, Śrī Brajendra Sawai Mahārājadhiraja Śrī Brajendra Singhji who, realizing the importance of the coins and their relevance to Indian history, granted Altekar the opportunity to study and publish the details in his 1954 book.

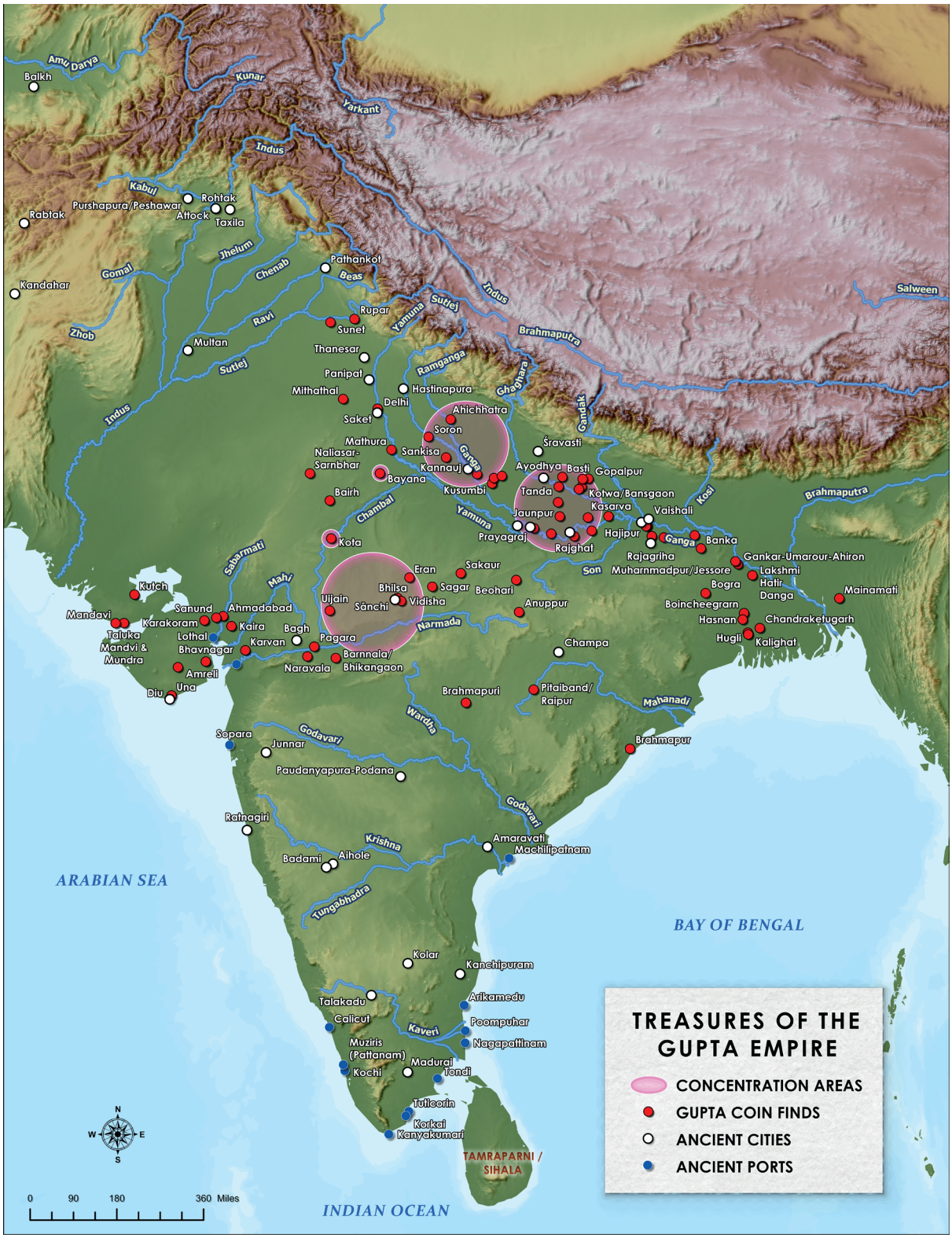
Figure 4.1. BH container. Bharatpur, Rajasthan. Fourth-fifth century AD. Copper. NM.

Figure 4.2. Kumāragupta I riding a horse, BH. Gift from Mahārāja of Bharatpur. PC.

The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bāyāna Hoard, by Altekar (1954), along with his second book published in 1957, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire,* became the primary reference books for the study of Gupta coins for generations of scholars and numismatists. The Bāyāna Hoard was the largest single find of Gupta gold coins up to that time.

Since then, a few other large hoards of Gupta gold coins have been found.[13] Coins continue to be found, and nowadays they are thankfully not melted down because even the jewelers in the remotest of towns in India have become keenly aware of the numismatic value of these coins. The opportunity afforded to Altekar to study the Bāyāna Hoard provided critical information on the Gupta dynasty, and new coin types and varieties came to light for the first time from his in-depth study. This hoard was a time capsule that had remained buried for over 1,500 years, and its importance was not only what coins and kings were represented within it, but also just as important was the information on what coin types and kings were missing from it. It was assumed that the pot must have been buried during the time of Skandagupta, and it is possible that the 285 coins melted down might have included his coins, as only one of his coins was recovered. This hoard, however, did not include any coins of the earliest coin types struck by Chandragupta I of the *Rājadaṇḍa*

13. Kumar 2017: 114–16.



Map 4.2. Gupta Dynasty gold coin find spots and concentration areas.

Type or the King and Queen on Couch Type. Both types were struck in very limited numbers and have only been found in the Vārāṇasī-Murshidabad area. A few very important coins discovered within the hoard were the gold coin of Kāchagupta with the *Garuḍadhvaja* on the obverse (coin **209**). This solitary specimen, for the first time, confirmed that Kāchagupta had in fact taken over the Gupta throne. None of his other gold coins featured a *Garuḍadhvaja* within the coin design, and as his name had been eliminated from the official Gupta genealogy on the Gupta seals and inscriptions, it was assumed by historians that Kācha had never ruled the Gupta Empire. This coin, however, with the *Garuḍadhvaja* confirmed that he had indeed taken the throne. In addition to this coin, the hoard revealed new coin types and a vast number of new dies and varieties, all of which are detailed by Altekar in his books.

The Gupta gold coinage was vast, as trade flourished during the Gupta era. The gold coins were the principle form of currency within most regions of the empire, especially for land purchases. Silver and lead coinage served as the primary currency in the western regions of Gujarat and Kathiawar. Even though thousands of the coins have undoubtedly been melted over the years, hundreds are found annually, either individually or in hoards. An exhaustive summary of all the published finds and hoards, as well as unpublished hoard details, are presented at the end of this section along with all reference details. The find spots shown on the map have been compiled from published reports as well as detailed interviews with the primary dealers and jewelers who have personally purchased and sold off the unpublished hoards.

Gold Coins: The pink circles on the maps are the prime areas where the majority of the Gupta gold coins have been and continue to be found.

Silver Coins: Hoards are found in Gujarat from Junāgaḍh (*Garuḍa* Type) and from Mandavi (Altar Type). Additional spots are the Ahemdabad and Bhavnagar districts. The *Madhyadeśa* Peacock Type silver coins are found from Ujjain, Mandsaur, Ērāṉ, Vidiśā in Madhya Pradesh, as well as in the Maholi district of Himachal Pradesh, and the Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Copper Coins: Gupta copper coins have been randomly found in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and so far no large hoards have been found.

Lead Coins: These are primarly found in and around Diu and Una in Gujarat.

The ancient texts *Padmaprābhritakam* and the *Ubahayābhisārikā* mention that during the Gupta era, the markets of Ujjain and Pāṭaliputra were filled with the horses, elephants, chariots, soldiers, and all kinds of goods, and that the markets were filled with sellers and buyers doing brisk trade. The Gupta kings continued to maintain control over the trade routes crisscrossing India with easy access and good safe passage for the caravans. This included Samudragupta's expansion of the empire to the north and consolidation of the kingdoms in central India under his control, to Chandragupta II's and Kumāragupta's eventual control of the western regions under the Kṣatrapas (Malwa, Gujarat, and Sāurāṣṭra); trade continued to prosper within the region.[14] The primary centers of trade, along the primary trade routes and religious centers, tend to be the natural, primary find spots for the coins.

India was always rich in gold, as is evidenced from references in classical literature and its prescribed use within various religious ceremonies. The *Indika* of Megasthenes describes this land as

14. Chandra 1977.

rich in gold and silver, among other materials. It seems that gold was mined and sourced from all over India: from the Kolār gold field in Mysore to Orissā, West Bengal, and Assam, Bijnor, Nanital, and Gharwal in Uttar Pradesh, the Chattor District in Andhra Pradesh, in the sands of the Himalayan rivers and Simla hills, the Bilaspur District of Jammu and the Kāśmīr Region, the Wayanad gold field of Gudalur of Nilgiri, as well as the Coimbatore and Salem Districts of Madras. Gold also flowed through the trade routes from the Oxus region in the northwest, central and western Asia, Egypt, as well as the Roman Empire. Gold also came to India from a brisk trade with China, flowing through Southeast Asia. There has been much debate on the Gupta mints and their locations.

So far, no official mint sites have been found or excavated, nor have any of the coin dies used for production been found. Of course, it was of paramount importance to guard these dies in order to preserve the sanctity of the official currency. The broken and worn dies were melted and disposed of carefully by the mints to ensure that they did not ever get into the wrong hands. We do occasionally see Kuṣāṇa coin dies appear on the market. Whether these were original dies or dies made for spurious production is not clear, but in time, I fully expect some dies to show up, given the massive production of the Guptas in gold, silver, and lead coinage.

There seem to at least three official Gupta mints operating at the height of the Empire during the reigns of Samudragupta up to the reign of Kumāragupta I. Each mint and their craftsmen had their unique design styles, and each mint produced coins of the most common coin types: Javelin, Archer, Horseman, *Chhatra*, Lion-Slayer. These mints were primarily located within the major trade zones and routes of that time; the primary royal mint for gold coins must have been located close to the capital of the Gupta Empire in the Kannauj-Kāśī region. The coins originating from this region seem to be always of excellent artistic design and quality. In fact, the earliest of the Gupta coins, those struck by Chandragupta I of the King and Queen on Couch Type and *Rājadaṇḍa* Type, have only been found from this region.

A second royal mint seems to be in the Bāyāna/Kota region and produced very high-quality designs. A third mint in the Vidiśā-Ujjain region produced characteristically small and dumpy designs (see coins **384**, **412**). In addition to these three main mints that was producing the gold coins, it is possible that gold coins were also struck by mobile mint(s) that would have accompanied the Gupta army during their various military campaigns, producing coins of less artistic designs. Such a mobile mint would have been necessary to strike official Gupta gold coins from captured gold and bounty to pay for the ongoing expenses of the war effort while the army was on the move.

The wide variation in designs and gold purity found across the coins of the same type and variety (i.e., Samudragupta Javelin Type, Chandragupta II Archer Type, and Kumāragupta I Horseman Type) could be a result of such mobile mint(s) employing local craftsmen from a local, captured mint, who were copying the designs created at the royal mint, or possibly as a function of economic stress. Incidentally, these three coin types also represent the three coin types with the highest mintage.

The mint(s) producing the lead and silver coins in the Sāurāṣṭra and Kutch regions in Gujarat were likely originally Kṣatrapa mints. These Kṣatrapa mint(s) under Gupta rule continued to produce the newly designed Gupta coins primarily in silver and lead following the Kṣatrapa tradition and slowly started innovating new designs under Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. It seems that the Guptas lost control of western regions after Skandagupta, as the Gujarat-style lead and silver Gupta coinage effectively ceases from this region after his reign.

COPPER PLATE GRANT from year 198 of the Gupta Era (AD 517), by a donor named Nāgavasu, who purchased two *kulyavāpa* of land for a sum of two gold dīnāra coins, covering three distinct parcels of uncultivated land, to be given to the Jaina monasteries in the localities of Śimīpuñja, Madhyamasṛgālikā, and Grāmakūṭagohālī, for the sustenance of the monks, for the regular performance of worship, and for the maintenance of the buildings. This new grant is issued from the capital of Puṇḍravardhana, presumably the site now known as Mahasthangarh in northwestern Bangladesh. (A. Griffiths, 2018, pp. 35–37).

5. Inscriptions and Dates

5.1. Inscriptions

The two examples below of royal Gupta inscriptions highlight how they are the key to understanding the genealogy of the Gupta kings. Royal Gupta inscriptions listed their lineage up to the time of the inscription, the place, and in many cases the dates. The Tumain Inscription for example tells us that Ghaṭotkachagupta was serving as governor of the ancient city of Airikiṇa, close to Eraṇ, Madhya Pradesh.

Figure 5.1. Tumain Inscription of Kumāragupta I (GE 116). Bhaṇḍarkar 1981, Vol. III, p. 279.

The Bhitarī Seal below was found at Bhitarī, Gazipur district, Uttar Pradesh, ca. 1886. This copper royal seal of Kumāragupta III lists his genealogy going back to the founder of the Gupta Dynasty, *Mahārāja* Śrīgupta. Like other official royal inscriptions, it omits Kāchagupta as well as Skandagupta. Its discovery brought to light three previously unknown Gupta kings: Purugupta, Narasiṁhagupta I, and Kumāragupta III. It omits Rāmagupta, Kāchagupta, and Skandagupta, and lists the official Gupta dynasty genealogy as:

> Of the *Mahārājādhirāja,* Śrī Samudragupta, who was the exterminator of all kings; without an equal on earth; who was the son of the son's son (great grandson) of *Mahārājā,* Śrīgupta, who was the son's son (grandson) of the *Mahārāja,* Śrī Ghaṭotkacha, (and) who was the son of the *Mahārājādhirāja,* Śrī Chandragupta (I), (and) who was the daughter's son of the Lichchhavis, begotten on the *Mahādevī* Kumāradevī. The son (was) the *Paramabhāgvata,* the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the prosperous Chandragupta (II), who was approved by him (for the throne by Samudragupta); who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Dattadevī; and who was himself without an equal on earth; His son, who meditated on his feet, (and) who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Dhruvadevī, (was) the *Mahārājādhirāja,* Śrī

Kumāragupta (I). His son, who meditated at his feet, (and) who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Anantadevī, (was) the *Mahārājādhirāja,* Śrī Purugupta. His son, who meditated on his feet, (and) who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Chandradevī (was) the *Mahārājādhirāja,* Śrī Narasiṁhagupta. His son, who meditated on his feet, (and) who was begotten on the *Mahādevī*, the prosperous Mittradevī (is) the *Paramabhāgavata*, the *Mahārājādhirāja,* Śrī Kumāragupta.[1]

Figure 5.2. Electrotype copy of a seal of Kumāragupta III. BM 1890,0213.1. Original seal Lucknow. 4.6" × 5.75".

1. Legend: CIII, Vol. III, 1981, Willis 2005: 131–50.

5.2. The Mathurā Pilaster Inscription and the Question of Eras

The start date for Chandragupta II has been proposed by historians to be AD 375. Based on my appraisal of the data, this date now needs to be revised to AD 383 as I will show below, based on a reassessment of the Mathurā Pilaster Inscription. This octagonal pillar was originally attached to a well near the Rangēśvara Mahādēva temple at Mathurā and was discovered in 1928. Bhanḍarkar read and published the inscription on the pillar; it is in Sanskrit and written in an early Gupta period Brāhmī script which was almost identical to the script used for the Kuṣāṇa inscriptions. The inscription covers five of the faces of this pillar, and one side of the pillar features a sculpted *triśūla* with a standing figure identified as a Lakulīśa at the base by Bhanḍarkar and later assumed to be a figure of Caṇda Caṇdeśvara, a pre-Lakulīśa deity.[2] When Bhanḍarkar studied this inscription, the letters were still readable. He later published a rubbing of this inscription in 1933. This pilaster is now housed in the Mathurā Government Museum and Vinay Gupta of the Archaeological Survey of lndia was kind enough to take detailed photographs of this pilaster for my reference. Unfortunately, in the last 80+ years, the pillar was exposed to the elements and the inscription is no longer easily readable; however, the carved letters can still be seen at an angle and it should be possible to read this important inscription using modem high-tech tools with special lighting. According to Bhanḍarkar, lines 3–5 of the inscription are:

... vijayarājya—saṁvatsa[re]..... kāl ānuvarttamanā saṁ
vatsare ēka—shashṭhē 60 1 ..... prathamē śukla-divasē paṁ
chamyām....

Bhanḍarkar proposed that this inscription was dated to the year 61 of the Gupta era, and historians have universally accepted this interpretation of the date from this inscription and used it as their sole basis for establishing the date for Chandragupta II's ascent to power in AD 376. The thought process universally followed by scholars is as follows: the Gupta Era started in AD 319, therefore AD 320 = Elapsed Year 1 of the Gupta era, 61 GE = AD 320 + 61 = AD 381 is the (elapsed) year when the inscription was written.[3] Diskalkar also published this inscription and confirmed that in his reading of the inscription, the word prior to *kālānuvarttamanā* was abraded and the assumption that this era mentioned in this inscription (*Gupta Kāla*) was just that: an assumption. He further read the regnal year as:

prathamē—the first regnal year, instead of *paṁchamyām* (1937: 170).

Sircar also studied this inscription in detail and concluded that the year 61 was the Gupta era (even though there is no mention of a Gupta-Kala in the inscription) and further proposed that the regnal year mentioned was *pamchaṁe*—fifth regnal year, and not *prathamē*.[4] Sircar's paper on the reading of the inscription of regnal year five written in Gupta era 61 has so far been taken as gospel by all scholars and historians, and accordingly the date for Chandragupta II has been fixed to AD 376 (fifth regnal year of Chandragupta II's reign= AD 381 - 5 (*pamchaṁe*) = AD 376), which then also became the year assigned by historians as the last year of Samudragupta I.

2. Acharaya 2005.
3. Goyal 2005: 256; Thaplyal 2012: 168.
4. Sircar 1942: 269, n. 2.

Falk reviewed this inscription and disputed Sircar's reading of the word *pamchaṁe,* as this word was completely abraded on the inscription and it was not possible to read this from the rubbing published by Bhanḍarkar, as had been proposed by Sircar.[5] Falk further pointed out that Bhanḍarkar (as well as Sircar) had made an error in assuming that the year 61 was referring to the Gupta era; i.e., the inscription does not state that the year 61 was *Gupta-Kala.* Rather, in this Mathurā pillar inscription, the year referenced is *kālānuvarttamanā-saṁvatsare* (in the year of continuing time; i.e., the year that continues (*ānuvarttamanā*) the previous era (*kala*) of the Kuṣāṇas, which Falk pointed out succinctly, refers to year AD 327. This was in keeping with the Mathurā tradition of using the Kuṣāṇa era dates starting with year AD 127, which was the start of the Kuṣāṇa era with year 1 = AD 127, the year of the accession of Kanishka I. Mathurā was the winter capital of the Kuṣāṇas and inscriptions from Mathurā use this dating system.

Falk discussed four additional Mathurā inscriptions where the term *kālānuvarttamanā* is used, and in particular to an inscription on the Yakśa figurine from the time of Kumāragupta I,[6] which uses the term *vijayarājya-saṁvatsare* (100+[10]+2, victorious ruling year 112 of Kumāragupta; i.e., dynastic reckoning of the Guptas) as well as *kālānuvarttamanā pamchaṁe* (i.e., the fifth year of the *kālānuvarttamanā* dating system). Therefore, 112 of Gupta Era = AD 320 + 112 = AD 432 and the fifth year of the *kālānuvarttamanā* equals AD 432 - 5 = AD 427; i.e., the century of the continuing time of the reign of Kumāragupta I. As such, Chandragupta II would have reigned within the century that started in AD 327, during the era in the continuing time of Chandragupta II.

Harry Falk's brilliant interpretation of the Gupta era *vis-à-vis* Kuṣāṇa era was groundbreaking. Applying this analysis a bit further will help us determine an important date for Chandragupta II's ascent to the throne. The continuing regnal year (AD 327) of *Mahārājadhirāja* Chandragupta II would confirm the date of the Mathurā pilaster inscription is AD 327 + 61 = AD 388.

If we were to accept the Sircar reading of the term *pamchaṁe,* then it is my proposal that the real of ascent for Chandragupta II, was the fifth elapsed regnal year in the continuing era of his rule, which equates to AD 388 - 5 = AD 383.

The table on the following pages summarizes all Gupta-related inscriptions with dates and the eras referenced within.

5. Falk 2004: 167–76.
6. Stadtner 2002.

Map 5.1. Locations of copper plates and inscriptions and seals in relation to Gupta coin find spots, ancient cities, and ancient ports.

5.3. Gupta Inscriptions and Seals

	Inscription/Seal	King/Gupta Era	Date GE/AD	Era Used in Inscription	Line	Reference	Find Spot/ Archaeological Site	Coin Found?
1	Allahabad Pillar Inscription	Samudragupta I				Bhandarkar 1981: 203–20	Originally at Kaushambi; now at Prayāraj	yes
2	Eraṇ stone inscription	Samudragupta I				Fleet 1888: 20–21. Bhandarkar 1981: 223–24.	Eraṇ, Sagar district, Madhya Pradesh (MP)	yes
3	Nālandā spurious copper plate	Samudragupta I	GE 5/AD 324	Saṁvat, regnal year 5	10	Bhandarkar 1981: 224–28, Sircar 1942: 272–73, Fleet 1888: 254–56	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
4	Gaya spurious copper plate	Samudragupta I	GE 9/AD 328	Saṁvat, regnal year 9	14	Bhandarkar 1981: 228–31	Gaya district, Bihar	yes
5	3 Vidiśā Jain stone image inscriptions	Rāmagupta				Bhandarkar 1981: 231–4	Durjanpur, Vidiśā district, MP	yes
6	Mathurā pilaster inscription	Chandragupta II	GE 61/AD 380	Kālānuvarttamanā	4	*EI*: 21:1	Mathurā district, Uttar Pradesh (UP)	yes
7	Lintel with inscription	Unknown	GE 70/AD 389	Kālānuvarttamanā saṁvatsare	1	Harry Falk 2004: 172		
8	Udayagirī cave inscription	Chandragupta II	GE 82/AD 401	saṁvatsare	2	Bhandarkar: 243	Vidiśā district, MP	yes
9	Gadhwa stone inscription	Chandragupta II	GE 88/AD 407	Rājya saṁvatsare	10–11	Bhandarkar: 245	Rewa district, MP	yes
10	Sanchi stone inscription	Chandragupta II	GE 93/AD 412	Saṅ	11	Bhandarkar: 250	Raisen district, MP	yes
11	Mathurā stone inscription	Chandragupta II				Bhandarkar: 250–55	Mathurā district, UP	yes
12	Udayagirī cave inscription	Chandragupta II				Bhandarkar: 255–57	Vidiśā district, MP	yes
13	Mehrauli iron pillar	Chandragupta II				Bhandarkar: 257–59	South Delhi	yes
14	Puṇe copper plate	Prabhāvatigupta	regnal year 13	saṁvatsare		*EI* 15: 41ff, Sircar 1942, 1: 411=15	Puṇe, Mahārāṣṭra	
15	Mandasour inscription	During the reign of Naravarman, eulogy…during the reign of Chandragupta II, construction of a temple of Kṛṣṇa(?)	AD 403–405/ dated Kṛta 461		5	Dániel Balogh, *Inscriptions of the Aulikaras and Their Associates* (*IAA*) volume 4: 35–45, Bhandarkar: 261–66	Archaeological site at the village of Sondani about 4 km south of Mandsaur (Mandasor) in north-western MP	yes

Table 5.1. Gupta inscriptions and seals discovered from various archaeological sites in India

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

16	Rithpur/Riddhapur copper plate	Prabhāvatigupta, during the time of Pravarasena II	regnal year 19			*JPASB, N.S.* 20: 58ff	Amaravati, Ellichpur, Berar, Mahārāṣṭra	
17	Miregaon plates	Prabhāvatigupta	regnal year 20				Miregäon in the Lakhäni tehsïl of the Bhandārā district of Mahārāṣṭra	
18	Basarh clay seal	Dhruvasvāminī				Bhaṇḍarkar: 260–61	Vaisali district, Bihar	
19	Chammak copper plate	Pravarasena II, regnal year 18, during the reign of Chandra-gupta II				*Archaeo. Sur. W. Ind.*, IV, p. 116ff, *Indian Antiquary* (*IA*), 12: 239ff; Fleet, *Corp. Ins. Ind.*, Ill, 1888: 236 ff.	Chamman, Ellichpur, Berar, Amaravati, Mahārāṣṭra	
20	Bihar Kotra Stone inscription	During the time of Nara-varman, during the reigh of Kumāragupta I, construction of a well for the Buddhist *saṅgha*	474 Kṛta/ AD 417–418		1–3	Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 50, Bhaṇḍarkar: 266–67	Bihar-Kotra, Raygarh	yes
21	Bihar Kotra Cave Inscription of the Time of Naravarman	Naravarman, construction of a rock shelter for the Buddhist *saṅgha*. Persons mentioned Siṃhavarman, Naravarman; Bhadantadāsa, Saṅghila	474 Kṛta/ AD 417–418			Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 53	Bihar-Kotra, Raygarh	
22	Bilsad stone pillar	Kumāragupta I	GE 96/AD 415	Vijayarājya saṁvatsare	6	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 267–70	Etah district, UP	yes
23	Yaksa inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 112/AD 431	Vijayarājya saṁvatsare Kālānuvarttamanā	1, 2	D Stadtner 2002, Harry Falk 2004: 171		
24	Gaḍhwa stone inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 98/AD 417	Rājya saṁvatsare	2	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 271	Rewa district, MP	yes
25	Nagari Inscription of Kṛta 481	During the reign of Kumāragupta I	481 Kṛta Era (c. AD 424).			Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 245	Nagari village, Rajasthan	
26	Udayagirī cave inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 106/AD 425			Fleet 1888: 258–59	Vidiśā district, MP	yes
27	Mathurā stone inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 107/AD 425	Vijayarājya	1	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 272–73	Mathurā, UP	yes
28	Dhanaidaha copper plate	Kumāragupta I	GE 113/AD 432	Not written		*EI*:17: 345, Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 275	Rajshahi district, Bangladesh	yes
29	Tumain inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 116/AD 435	Not written		Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 275–9	Tumain is a village in Guna District, MP	yes

30	Karamdanda Liṅga stone inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 117/AD 436	Vijayarājya saṁvatsare	3	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 282–83	Faizabad district, UP	yes
31	Mandasaur inscription	Kumāragupta I	Krita (Malava) year AD 493/436		34–35, 39 (verses)	K.L. Mankodi: 307, Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 331	Mandsaur, MP	yes
32	Kalaikuri Sultanpur Copper Plate Inscription	During the time of Kumāragupta I	GE 120/AD 439	Saṁvat	34	Sircar 1942: 352–5, *IAHQ* 19: 12–26, *EI* 31: 57–66.	Nowgong in Sultanpur in Bogra district, Bangladesh	yes
33	Buddhist pedestal	Not named	GE 120/AD 439	Kālānuvarttamanā saṁvatsare		Thaplyal 1982, H Falk 2004: 171		
34	Dāmodarpur copper plate	Kumāragupta I	GE 124/AD 443	Saṁvat		Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 282–87, *EI* 15: 113, 130–31	Dinajpur district in Bangladesh (?)	yes
35	Mathurā image inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 125/AD 444	Rājya saṁvatsa[are]	1	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 288.	Mathurā district, UP	yes
36	Dāmodarpur copper plate	Kumāragupta I	GE 128/AD 447	Saṁ	1	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 288–89, *EI* 15: 114, 132–33.	Dinajpur district in West Bengal	yes
37	Baigram copper plate	Kumāragupta I	GE 128/AD 447	Saṁ	25	*EI*: 21: 78–80, Sircar 1942: 355–59	Bogra district, Bangladesh	yes
38	Jagadishpur copper plate	During the time of Kumāragupta I	GE 128/AD 447	Saṁ	28	*EI* 38(6):247–49	Jagadishpur village, Putia police station, Rajshahi District, Bangladesh	yes
39	Mankuwar stone inscription	Kumāragupta I	GE 129/AD 448	Saṁvat	2	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 293	Allahabad District, UP	yes
40	Gaḍhwa stone inscription	Kumāragupta I	Lost and broken	Rājya saṁvatsare	2	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 294	Rewa district, MP	yes
41	Basarh clay seal	Ghaṭotkachagupta					Vaisali district, Bihar	yes
42	Junagadh rock inscription	Skandagupta	GE 136/137/138 AD 455/456/457	136–Saṁvatsarāṇām, 137– Saṁvatsarāṇām, 138–Guptāṇāṁkāla	15, 18, 27	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 300–1	Girnar hill near Junagadh, Gujarat	yes
43	Talgunda stone pillar inscription	Śāntivarmana				*IA* 25: 27f, *EI* 8: 24–31, Sircar 1942: 450–55	Talagunda, Shimoga District, Mysore, Karnataka	yes
44	Kahaum stone pillar inscription	Skandagupta	GE 141/AD 460	Not written		Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 307	Khukhundoo in the state of UP	yes
45	Bhitari stone pillar inscription	Skandagupta, Budhagupta		Not written		Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 312–17	Bhitari (Saidpur), District Ghazipur, UP	yes

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

46	Mandsaur Inscription	Mention of the name of Chandragupta (II), Govindagupta	467–468/ dated Mālava 524 expired	Mālava Saṃvat 524		Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 76	Mandsaur fort, Mandsaur district, MP	yes
47	Supia pillar inscription	Skandagupta	GE 141/AD 460	Rājya saṁvatsare	8	Bhanḍarkar 1981: 318	Rewa district of MP	yes
48	Indore copper plate	Skandagupta	GE 146/AD 465	Vijayarājya saṁvatsare	3	Bhanḍarkar 1981: 310	Indrapura, Dibhai, Bulandshar district, UP	yes
49	Ganj inscription	Vyāghra of the time of Prithvisena II				*EI*: 17:12–16, 362	Ganj, Panna District, MP	yes
50	Ajanta cave inscription	Harisena				Sircar 1942: 425, *IC* 7: 372, Bhagabanlal Indraji, "Inscription from the Cave temples of western India": 67–9, *Nagpur University Journal* Dec. 1940/6: 41.	Cave 17, Ajanta, Aurangabad district, Mahārāṣṭra	
51	Bihar stone pillar inscription	Purugupta					Bihar	yes
52	Sārnāth stone inscription	Kumāragupta II	GE 154/AD 473			Bhanḍarkar 1981: 321	Northeast of Vārāṇasī, near the confluence of the Ganges and the Varuna rivers in UP	yes
53	Mandsaur Inscription of the Silk Weavers	Bandhuvarmana during the time of Kumāragupta II	Krita year (=Malava) AD 529/473		34–35, 39 (verses)	K.L. Mankodi: 307, Bhanḍarkar 1981: 331, Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 87	Mandsaur district located on Border of Mewar and Mālava region of MP	
54	Sārnāth stone inscription	Buddhagupta	GE 157/AD 476	Not written		Bhanḍarkar 1981: 333	Northeast of Vārāṇasī, near the confluence of the Ganges and the Varuna rivers in UP	yes
55	Vārāṇasī stone pillar inscription	Budhagupta	GE 159/AD 478	Saṁva	1	Bhanḍarkar 1981: 334	Rajghat, Vārāṇasī, UP	yes
56	Paharpur copper plate	During the time of Budhagupta	GE 159/AD 478	Saṁ	20	*EI*: 20: 59–64	Paharpur, Bogra district of Bangadesh	yes
57	A Copper plate Inscription of [Gupta], Raktamala copper plate	During the time of Budhagupta	GE 159/AD 478	Śata-saṁvatsare (ll.4,6)			Puṇḍravardhana, Bengal	yes
58	Mathurā stone pedestal inscription	During the time of Budhagupta	GE 161/AD 480	Not written		Thaplyal and Srivastava 1982, ESI 9: 6	Mathurā district, UP	yes

59	Gangdhar stone inscription	Aulikara king Viśvavarmana 480 CE		Not written		Fleet 1888: 76–78, Sircar 1942, 1: 405	Gaṅgādhar is located in Jhalawar district, Kota division, Rajasthan	yes
60	Dāmodarpur copper plate	Budhagupta	GE 163/AD 482	Saṁ	1	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 335–39, *EI* 15: 114–15, 134–7.	Dinajpur district in West Bengal	yes
61	Eraṇ stone inscription	Budhagupta,	GE 165/AD 484	Not written		Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 340–41	Sagar district, MP	yes
62	Dāmodarpur copper plate	Budhagupta	lost	Not written		Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 342–43	Dinajpur district in West Bengal	yes
63	Bihar stone pillar inscription	Budhagupta	Not written			Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 345–50	Northern gate of old fort of Odantapuri Bihar	
64	Nālandā clay seal	Budhagupta	Not written			Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 350, *EI* 21: 77	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
65	Shankarpur copper plate	Budhagupta	GE 166/AD 485			Jain 1977: 64	Shankarpur, Siddhi district, MP	yes
66	Nandapur copper plate	Budhagupta	GE 169/AD 488	Saṁ	19	*EI*: 23:52–56	Nandapur, south bank of Gaṅgā, Monghyr, Bihar	
67	Khoh copper plate	Hastin	GE 163/AD 482	saṁvatsare	2	Fleet 1888: 100–2	Satna district, MP	yes
68	Chhoti Sadri Inscription of Gauri	Puṇyasoma, Rājyavardhana, Rāṣṭra(vardhana?), Yaśagupta, Gauri, Bhramarasoma, Mitrasoma, Jīvadharaṇa, Aparājita, Gobhaṭa of Aulikaras	(Mālava) 547			Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 110	Mandsaur district located on Border of Mewar and Mālava region of MP	
69	Karitalai copper plate	Jayanāth	GE 174/AD 493	saṁva	24–25	Fleet 1888: 117–18	Jabalpur, Katni district, MP	
70	Bhamodara-Mohotta copper plate	Droṇosiṁgha	GE 183/AD 502	Saṁ	11	Sircar 1942: 403–5	Bhabnagar, Gujarat	
71	Gunaighar copper plate	Vainyagupta	GE 188/AD 507	Saṁ	31	*Indian Historical Quarterly,* 6: 45–61	Gunaighar, Comilla, district of Tippera, Bangladesh	yes
72	Nālandā clay seal	Vainyagupta				Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 350, *EI* 21: 77	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
73	Eraṇ stone inscription	Bhānugupta,	GE 191/AD 510	Saṁvat	2	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 353	Sagar district, MP	
74	Eraṇ stone boar inscription	Toramāṇa regnal year 1	GE 191/AD 510			Fleet 1888: 158–61	Sagar district, MP	yes
75	Risthal Inscription	Prakāśadharman		dated (Mālava) 572		Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 132	Risthal, MP	yes

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

76	Nālandā clay seal	Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya I				Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 354	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
77	Majhgawan copper plate	Hastin	GE 191/AD 510	saṁvatsare	2	Fleet 1888: 107–8	Satna district, MP, Baghelkhand area	yes
78	Sohawal copper plate	Śarvanāth	GE 191/AD 510				Baghalkhand central India	
79	Nālandā clay seals	KG III				Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 355–56	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
80	Bhitari copper-silver seal	KG III				Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 358	Bhitari (Saidpur), District Ghazipur, UP	yes
81	Dāmodarpur copper plate	Viṣṇugupta	GE 224/AD 543	Sa[mva]	1	Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 360–64	Dinajpur district in West Bengal	yes
82	Nālandā clay seals	Viṣṇugupta	GE 224/AD 543			Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 364–65	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
83	Mandasaur inscription	Yasodharmana		dated Mālava expired 589		Fleet 1888: 142–46, Dániel Balogh, *IAA* volume 4: 153	Mandsaur, MP	
84	Mandasaur duplicate stone pillar inscription	Yasodharmana				Fleet 1888: 149–50	Mandsaur district located on Border of Mewar and Mālava region of MP	
85	Mandasaur duplicate stone pillar inscription	Yasodharmana and Viṣṇuvardhana		dated Mālava expired 589		Fleet 1888: 150–58	Mandsaur, MP	yes
86	Navagram copper plate	Hastin	GE 198/AD 517	Mahāśvayuja saṁvatsare	2	*EI*: 21: 126	Karakuram Highway in Western Himalayas	
87	Betul copper plate inscription	Parivrājaka king Saṁkshobha, village grant, in the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Gupta kings,	GE 199/AD 518	Mahāmārgaśiraha saṁvatsare	3	Raybahadur Hira Lal, "Inscriptions in the central provinces and Berar, Nagpur": 87–88, *EI* 8: 284	Nagpur, Mahārāṣṭra	
88	Bhumara stone pillar inscription	Hastin and Śarvanath	GE 189 and 201, 508 and 520	saṁvatsare	8	Fleet 1888: 111–12	Satna district, MP	yes
89	Khoh copper plate	Śarvanath	GE 209/AD 528	saṁvatsare	24	Fleet 1888: 114–15	Satna district, MP	yes
90	Khoh copper plate	Śarvanath	GE 214/AD 533			Fleet 1888: 136–37	Satna district, MP	
91	Gwalior stone inscription	Mihirkula,	regnal year 15			Fleet 1888: 161–63	Gwalior fort, MP	yes

92	Sanjeli copper plate	Toramāna					Sanjeli, Panchmahal district, Gujarat	yes
93	Khura stone inscription	Time of Toramāna				*EI*, 1: 238	Khura, Punjab	
94	Sondhni Intact Pillar Inscription	Yaśodharman, mention of Gupta rulers, Hūṇa rulers, Mihirakula, Yaśodharman, eulogy of Yaśodharman				*Dániel Balogh, IAA volume 4: 175*	Sondhni, MP	
95	Sondhni Fragmentary Pillar Inscription of Yaśodharman	Eulogy of Yaśodharman, Gupta rulers, Hūṇa rulers, Mihirakula, Yaśodharman				*Fleet (1886d, CII3, 149–50), Dániel Balogh, IAA volume 4: 188*	Sondhni, MP	
96	Dāmodarpur copper plate	Viṣṇugupta				*EI*, 15: 115–6, 141–44	Dinajpur, West Bengal	
97	Nachna-ki-talai stone inscription	Mahārājā Prithivisena				*Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* 188, v. 21, *CII* 1888: 233–35	Nachna is a small village in the Panna district of MP	
98	Ramtek stone inscription/ Kevala Narasimha temple insctiption	Prabhāvatigupta memorial				Raybahadur Hira Lal, *Inscriptions in the central provinces and Berar*, Nagpur, pp. 3–5	Ramtek, Mahārāṣṭra	yes
99	Balaghat plates	Prithvisena II, Vākāṭaka geneology, relationship with Prabhāvatigupta, mention of Kuntala dynasty				Raybahadur Hira Lal, *Inscriptions in the central provinces and Berar*, Nagpur, pp. 18–20	Tiroḍī is located eight miles southeast of Katangi in the Balaghat district of MP	yes
100	Sangli plates	Govinda IV	Šaka Year 855 (AD 933)	Suvarnavarsha			Sangli, Mahārāṣṭra Sangameshwara Temple in Bhendwade, Khanapur taluk of Sangli	
101	Cambay copper plate	Govinda IV					Cambey, Gujarat	
102	Sanjan copper plate	Amoghavarṣā I	AD 872	Śaka-Saṁvat 793	Did not find	*EI* 18: 235	Thane district, Mahārāṣṭra	
103	Jaunpur inscription	Iśvaravarmana					Jaunpur, UP	yes
104	Haraha inscription	Iśānavarmana	AD 611/555–554	Vikram Saṁvat	Verse 21	*EI* 14: 110	Barabanki district, UP	yes

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

105	Aphsad inscription	Ādityasena				DC Sircar, *Select Inscription bearing on Indian History and Civilization (6–18 century CE)*, 2: 44, Fleet 1888: 202, *EI* 38: 183.	Apasadha, Bihar	yes
106	Sārnāth inscription	Prakāśāditya					Sārnāth, UP	yes
107	Faridpur copper plates	Dharmāditya, Gopachandra and Samāchāradeva, land grants, mention of Dināras, silver coins and gaṇḍakas				*IA* 1910. 39: 195, R. Mukherjee, *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions Bearing history and civilization of Bengal*, Kolkātā, pp. 74–87	Faridpur district Bangladesh	yes
108	Mallasarul copper plate	Of Vijayasena during the time of Gopachandra regnal year 33, record of a grant of land	GE 207/AD 526	Saṁvat	25	*Epigraphia Indica* 23:155–16.	Galsi PS, Barddhaman district, West Bengal	yes
109	Amauna copper plate	Māhārājā Nandana						yes
110	Nālandā stone inscription	Yaśovarmana					Nālandā, Bihar	yes
111	Vappaghoshavata grant	Jayanāga, village grant				*EI* 18: 60	Barddhamana district, West Bengal	yes
112	Ghugrahati copper plate	Samāchāradeva		Regnal year 14	20–23	*EI* 18: 75	Gopalgunj, Dhaka, Banghadesh	yes
113	Nālandā clay seal	Samāchāradeva				*Nālandā and its epigraphic materials*, pp. 31–22	Nālandā district, Bihar	yes
114	Gwalior Prasasti	Gurjara-Pratihāra king of Bhoja, mention of Rāmagupta incident				*EI* 18: 99	Gwalior, MP	yes
115	Gupta-period Copper plate Grants from Bengal	Land Grant	GE 198/AD 517			Arlo Griffiths, *Pratna Samiksha*: A Journal of Archaeology,2018, New Series (9), pp. 15–57	Nandapur, Bihar	yes

5.4. Dates on Gupta Coins and Inscriptions

The Gupta Era began in AD 319 with the accession of Chandragupta I to the imperial throne, and he proclaimed himself *Mahārājadhirāja* ("The Great King of Kings"). Al-Biruni, a renowned Persian scholar from the eleventh century, states that the *Gupta Kāla* can be calculated by adding 241 years to the Śaka Era.[7] Based on seventh-century Jaina texts written in 705 Śaka era, Pathak confirmed that Al-Biruni's statement was accurate and by adding 78 (start of the Śaka era) to 241 (the difference between the Śaka date in inscriptions vs. the Gupta era dates) we get the year AD 319.[8] This coincided with the calculations of the dates used by the Gupta kings in their inscriptions, as well as the dates found on the Gupta lead and silver coins with Śaka dates. Many of the inscriptions from that time are also dated in the Malwa era (ME) or Vikrama era, which started in 57 BC. For example, the Mandasor Stone Inscription of Kumāragupta I and Bandhuvarman is dated to ME 493 and ME 529 (ME 493 - 57 = AD 436; ME 529 - 57 = AD 472). The Haraha inscription[9] of Iśanavarman is dated to Vikrama Saṁvat 611 = AD 554.

Era	Start Date Year 1
Vikrama Saṁvat (Malwa Era)	57 BC
Śaka	AD 78
Bactrian Era	AD 223
Gupta Era*	AD 319
Hūṇā Era	AD 448

* Gupta Era is same as Vallabhi Era.

Table 5.2. Eras in Indian antiquity and their BC and AD equivalent start dates

As the Gupta Empire expanded and new territories were conquered, the local coinage introduced by the Guptas changed to include the *Garuḍa* figure. Chandragupta II seems to have had his first success in the conquest of Gujarat and western territories, which were controlled by the Western Kṣatrapas in AD 398, and eventually, he annexed the provinces of Malwa and Eastern Gujarat into his empire. The coins issued in that year show both the Gupta and Kṣatrapa designs: the *Garuḍa* on the obverse and the three arched hills, the sun, and crescent symbols with the date of Varṣā 81 (81 + start of the Gupta era 319 = AD 400, coins **554**–**557**). This transition in the coinage from the Kṣatrapa designs to a *Garuḍa* is seen on the silver and lead coins issued by Chandragupta II. This confirms the start of the conquest of the Kṣatrapas—a campaign that lasts well into the reign of Kumāragupta I. King Rudrasiṁha III was the last Kṣatrapa king who continued to hold out against the Gupta forces and continued to issue coins in his name up to Śaka 337 (337 + start of the Śaka Era 78 = AD 415). Rudrasiṁha III was finally defeated by Kumāragupta I, which ended the Kṣatrapa dynasty's control over the western territories and its highly prized seaports.

While the coins issued by the Kṣatrapa kings almost always included a date, it is rare to find full dates on the Gupta coins as they are mostly always struck off the flan. After the

7. Fleet C.1.1. III: 24.
8. Pathak 1977.
9. See pp. 13–15.

conquest of the Kṣatrapa territories, the Gupta kings continued to issue lead and silver coins and modeled their coins using the familiar Kṣatrapa format because these coins primarily circulated in that region. On silver coins, the three arched hills symbol was eventually replaced by Gupta emblems: *Garuḍa*, peacock, and bull, altar, etc., depending on the local area for which the coin was produced. On some of these silver coins, the tradition of including a date was also carried forward. These dates help establish a timeline and serve as important markers for reconstructing Gupta history. On silver coins, the dates appear behind the head of the king on the obverse; however, since the coins were not struck uniformly, it is indeed a rare event to find silver Gupta coins with clearly visible dates. On lead coins, they eventually replaced the bull (which was the main device on the Kṣatrapa lead coins) with a *Garuḍa* (the imperial symbol of the Guptas) and added the name or the biruda of the Gupta king. The dates are mostly on the reverse on lead coins and are easily readable if the condition of the coin is good. On a few lead coins struck very early in the conquest of the Western Kṣatrapa, the dates also appear on the obverse. There are no dates found on the gold and copper coins.

Figure 5.3. *Va*[*rshe*] 90 = GE 90. PC, 3210.

This silver coin (Fig. 5.3), published for the first time in the first edition of this book, is a prime example of the importance of dates in the legends of Gupta coins. It shows the date of Varṣā 90 (Gupta Era 90 = AD 409) very clearly on the obverse. On the reverse of this coin, the legend also is very clear starting at three o'clock: *Paramabhāgavata mahārājādhirāja śrī Kumāragupta Mahendrādityaḥ* ("The most devout devotee, the Great King of Kings, his highness, Kumāragupta") (PC, 3210, Coin **739**). This coin might change how we understand the history of the Gupta Empire. It most definitely opens up a discussion on an earlier date of the accession for Kumāragupta I.

The last known dated inscription of Chandragupta II is the Sānchī Stone Inscription dated to GE 93 (AD 412). Therefore, a dating of this Kumāragupta I coin to GE 90 places him firmly in the Gujarat region confirming the continuing efforts to defeat the Kṣatrapas by AD 409 with the Gupta forces under his command, a task which he eventually accomplished by AD 415.[10]

Over the past century, scholars place the date for the succession of Kumāragupta I, after Chandragupta II somewhere between AD 412 and 415. The Bilsād Stone Pillar Inscription of Kumāragupta I is dated to GE 96 (confirming that he was ruling in AD 415). Majumdar proposed that Govindagupta ruled as a Gupta king between AD 412–415,[11] a theory, which can now be put aside with the discovery of this coin, as there is no evidence so far to confirm if he did rule at all. The fact that Kumāragupta I was busy dealing with the war on the western front could have given Govindagupta the chance to make a play for the Gupta throne in the last years of Chandragupta II but we have no coins or inscriptional evidence to support such

10. In Todd and Fishman's forthcoming book on Gupta silver coins, they also publish coins with dates of Śaka 329 (AD 407).
11. Bhaṇḍarkar 1981: 66; Thaplyal 2014: 206.

a theory. The earliest known date of Chandragupta II's capture of the Kṣatrapas territories can now be dated to Śaka 320 (AD 398) based on silver coin (**510**, p. 348). These dates provide us with a chronological marker during these turbulent times.

We find coins dates written in the Śaka era (following in the Kṣatrapa tradition) on a few rare silver coins, and later the coins show dates written in the Gupta era. Table 5.3 summarizes all the known Gupta coins with dates published so far (Bhandare, Fishman, Jha, Moller, Rajgor, and Senior), as well as key dated coins published here for the first time. A quick review of the table shows that Chandragupta II's mints were actively producing coins in both SE (Śaka era) as well as GE (Gupta era) starting with AD 398, which must be the year when Chandragupta II captured the first of the territories and mints under Kṣatrapas.

Rudrasiṁha III's silver coins dated SE 337 (AD 415) were considered the end marker for establishing the year when Kumāragupta I must have finally ended Kṣatrapa rule. The coins specimen number **739** of Kumāragupta I with a date of GE 90, along with a Chandragupta II coin with a GE 93 date hint at the possibility that Kumāragupta I may have ascended to power in the western territories *earlier* than the AD 415 date assumed so far. The Sānchī inscription dated GE 93 coincides with the coin 3202 (GE 93, AD 412) as the last date known on a Chandragupta II coin. The discussion around Kumāragupta I's ascent to power as speculated by Thaplyal, Goyal, Willis, and other scholars can now be put to rest based on the coins with GE 90 as well as GE 94, showing that the handover of the power from Chandragupta II to Kumāragupta I was gradual and that Kumāragupta I's ascent should now be moved up to AD 407. The transition from Kumāragupta I to Skandagupta has also been a topic of extensive debate, and the Junāgaḍh Rock Inscriptions and Bhitarī Pillar Inscriptions are used as the markers to establish the date for Skandagupta's ascent to the throne. Ahead we will see coins with clear dates that show that Skandagupta was issuing coins as early as AD 449 (GE 130), thereby confirming that in the tradition set by his father and grandfather, Skandagupta's ascent to power *also started much earlier.*

King	Śaka Era (SE)	Gupta Era (GE)
Chandragupta II	320–337	87–93
Kumāragupta I	329–331 and 337	90, 91, 94–124, 126, 130, 131
Skandagupta		130, 131, 140–149
Ghaṭotkachagupta		134
Purugupta		137
Budhagupta		157, 160, 165

Table 5.3. Dates known so far on silver and lead coins for Gupta kings

Gupta history shows us that events unfolded gradually over the course of many years; sometimes it took a decade for a transition to a new king. What was transpiring in the western regions or in Vidiśā was quite different than what may have been transpiring in the eastern part of the empire. The discussion of the war of succession in the sections dealing with Ghaṭotkachagupta and Skandagupta will help the reader better understand that the consolidation of power by Skandagupta was not an immediate event, and while he was issuing coins with dates of GE 130 in the Malwa region on the western front, Ghaṭotkachagupta may have issued gold coins from Vidiśā during this same time in order to try to justify his attempt

to seize the Gupta throne. We also now know of Purugupta, the stepbrother of Skandagupta also issued the *Madhyadeśa* Type coins with his name with a date of GE 137 (AD 456) (see p. 425).

After the death of Budhagupta, the Gupta Empire was besieged by the Hūṇā invaders. The Hūṇā Year started in AD 448 as Year 1 of the establishment of the Hūṇā Empire in the Oxus basin, a date that also coincides with the earliest coins with dates for Skandagupta. It seems that date of Year 1 of the start of Hūṇā era was the based on the beginning of their incursion into the Gupta Empire.[12] The first regnal year of Toramāṇa is AD 500 based on his silver coins showing a date of 52 (52 + 448 = AD 500). Toramāṇa is the Hūṇā king who invaded India and the Gupta Empire towards the end of Budhagupta's reign; Budhagupta was possibly killed in battle with Toramāṇa. The last date for Budhagupta is GE 165 (AD 484), known from his silver coins with his regnal year on the obverse (p. 469).

UNITS	
1	
2	
3	or
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
0	Was not used

TENS	
10	
20	
30	
40	
50	
60	
70	
80	
90	

HUNDREDS	
100	
200	
300	

Śaka Era Year 1 = AD 78
Gupta Era Year 1 = AD 319

Dates on coins are usually preceded by *Varshe (year) or just Va.*

Varshe 80 + 1 = Gupta Era 81
GE 81 + 319 = AD 400

Va 100 + 10 + 5 = 115
GE 115 + 319 = AD 434

Dates from inscrioptions and coins are assumed to have used current year 1 = AD 319, Instead of elapsed or expired year.

* Dates from inscriptions and coins are assumed here to have used the current year 1= AD 319, instead of elapsed or expired year; i.e., CE.

Table 5.4. Brāhmī numerals used on Gupta and Kṣatrapa coins

12. Fleet 1889: 229–30. Fleet believed this date 52 represents his regnal year which must have started in AD 460. Such an early date for the start of Toramāṇa's reign is untenable. The Hūṇa Era started in AD 448. Also see E. J. Rapson 1897, *Sources of Indian History, Encyclopedia of Indo Aryan Research*, Vol. II, part 3b, p. 29.

5.5. Coins and Currency of the Gupta Era

The main currency during the Gupta era was the gold dīnāra. We find the term "dīnāra" used frequently in the Gupta era inscriptions recording gifts made by the kings for supporting various religious activities and land transactions. The Kuṣāṇa kings also referred to their gold coins as dīnāra, and Rapson proposed that the term was derived from the *denarius aureus*, which is worth 25 silver *denāri.* The Kuṣāṇa gold coins were struck to a weight standard based on the Roman *aureus* of 120 grains (1 grain= 0.06479 grams).

The fourth century AD text *Aṅgvijja* uses the terms "*dināramāsaka*" and "*dināri.*" The second–third century *Bakshāli* manuscript refers to the *Dināra* and its various forms as *dināra*, *dināraka*, *di*, etc. It provides the ratio of the suvarṇa and dināra as 1:2/3 or 1 dināra = 66.67% of a suvarṇa. The Sānchī Stone Inscription (GE 93) of Chandragupta II refers to a donation of 25 dināras and states that just the interest of these dināras would be sufficient to feed five *bhikṣus* and let a lamp burn at the Jewel House. Various other Gupta inscriptions provide us with useful data about the going rate for one *kulyavāpa* of barren land during that time was sometimes two and at other times three dināras (see Table 5.1 for inscriptions of religious donations).

The gold *dināras* were issued by each of the successive Gupta kings. Over time, weights and the gold purity of these *dināras* varied widely, not just from king to king, but even within the coins issued by the same king. While it is not yet fully clear whether the value of a *dināra* during the Gupta era was mostly a function of its implied value rather than an economic one based on the weight and/or gold purity, a study of the land purchase/donation copper plates do offer some clues. Past scholarship had incorrectly proposed that the value of Gupta gold currency continued to go down over time, implying that it continued to be debased over the course of the successive Gupta kings.[13] While the earliest of the gold *dināras* issued by Chandragupta I (King and Queen Type) register a gold percentage of 94%, the same was not true for the *dināras* issued by Chandragupta II, which averaged approximately in the low 80s% purity. Gupta era inscriptions clearly confirm that the land transactions did not differentiate between the high purity *dināras* or the debased *dināras* issued by different Gupta kings. Instead the inscriptions just reference use the term dīnāra as a currency: five *dronas* of land bought for two *dināras*, or one *kulyavāpa* of barren land sold for three *dināras*, either transaction it seems could have been paid by gold coins struck by *any* of the Gupta kings, as they all seemed to be of the same implied value.[14] The exchange rates for Kārshāpaṇa ranged from 67–80 up to 100 Kārshāpaṇa to a dīnāra, and 16 rūpakas (silver coin) to a dīnāra in the greater Bengal region.[15]

Fractional dīnāras, smaller units of currency in Gupta gold coinage, are only confirmed through three specimens of Chandragupta II's half-dīnāra, all belonging to the Archer Type. Similar fractional currency, known from the Kuṣāṇa rulers, might have been in circulation during the Gupta period. Kuṣāṇa quarter-dīnāras weighed around 2.0 g and were about 13–14 mm in diameter. These fractional dīnāras likely enjoyed widespread acceptance in their time. However, Chandragupta II's attempt to introduce fractional dīnāras may have failed, as evidenced by their potential lack of acceptance. Consequently, the issuance of fractional dīnāras

13. This conclusion was incorrect because it was based on the color of the gold on coins and an increase in weight of the gold coins issued by successive Gupta kings. The very basic specific gravity studies by Maity, Srivastava, etc., were used by historians to reach such conclusions, which today has incorrectly become the accepted narrative in the history books (see the discussion in section 6.1 and Table 6.6).

14. Of course, it is possible that the seller may have objected to gold coins that visually appeared highly debased and may have refused to accept them; however, for the most part the value of the gold coins seems to have been accepted at face value.

15. Griffiths Arlo 2018. *Four More Gupta-period Copperplate Grants from Bengal,* Pratna Samiksha Vol. 9: 50.

might have been discontinued, as there are no records of other Gupta kings minting such fractional coins in gold.

Figure 5.4. Fractions. A. Kanishka I / Athso, 2.01 g, 12 mm. CNG 49-426 1.99 g, 12 mm, CNG XVIII-270. B. Huvishka / Skando-Komaro & Bizago, 1.95 g, 14 mm. Triton XVI-658. C. Huvishka / Shaoreo, 1.7 g, 14 mm. PC. D. Chandragupta II, half-dīnāra, Coin **363**, PC, 1106. 3.3 g, 15 mm. E. Chandragupta II, full dīnāra, PC, 1107, 7.8 g, 18 mm.

The silver coins issued by Kṣatrapas were most referred to as *dramma*, and is derived from the Greek drachma, which equaled 67.5 grains (4.37 g). The Indo-Greek kings issued silver coins referred to as hemidrachmas (half of a drachma = 2.18 g), which later became the standard weight for silver coins issued by the Sātavāhanas, Kṣatrapas, Guptas, Traikutakas, and the early Kalachuri King Krishnarāja. The Gupta kings also continued to issue these drammas in the western regions after capturing the territories controlled by the Kṣatrapa kings, and for the most part these Gupta silver coins are only found in the regions of Gujarat, Mālwā, and Kathiawar.

The Gupta kings also struck base metal coins in copper and lead. Copper coins are mostly found in western and central India. The main source of lead was most probably the Zawar mines of Rajasthan.[16] Silver and lead invariably occur together and in the process of the extraction of silver from the argentiferous galena, a large amount of lead is produced.[17] As a result, lead was readily available in the western regions where the silver currency was quite established. Following in the Kṣatrapa tradition, the Guptas also issued lead coins in large numbers in the western territories. However, we do not yet know what these lead coins were referred to at that time.

Another monetary unit in use during ancient time from the time of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* was the Kārshāpaṇa mostly issued in copper and silver. Up until recently, it was assumed that this monetary unit continued to be in use for smaller value transactions in the north, central and eastern Indian parts of the Gupta Empire. This was confirmed based on the recently deciphered copper plates.[18] The use of these terms on these plates confirms that during the Gupta period, *kārṣāpaṇas* were in use.

Cowrie shells was another form of currency used at the lowest level of transaction. The cowrie shells are still found in excavations of the Gupta era along with copper and lead coins. These cowrie shells were primarily from the Maldive Islands and have been found mostly in the central and eastern Indian excavations.

16. Hegde 1967: 63–66.
17. Bhardwaj 1987.
18. Griffiths 2018. "Four More Gupta-Period Copperplate Grants from Bengal," *Pratna Samiksha* 9: 15–57.

A COIN OF THE ARCHER TYPE was minted by a later Gupta monarch towards the end of fifth century AD, who adopted the prestigious title Chandragupta. Referred to as Chandragupta III, he is depicted with an auspicious *Śrīvatsa* symbol placed before his likeness on the front of this coin. Research in this area elucidates how these religious symbols were strategically positioned by mints to distinguish gold coins with reduced gold content, a practice undertaken periodically to mint extra gold coins for funding military campaigns. PC, 1113.

6. Metrology of Gupta Era Coinage

6.1. Metal Analysis and Weights of Gupta Coins

The composition and mass of the coins minted during the Gupta period offer vital insights into the economic conditions prevailing at the time. Spanning two centuries, the Gupta dynasty produced coinage in gold, silver, copper, and lead. This study focuses predominantly on their gold and silver coins. It is crucial to remember that these coins originated from various mints scattered across the expansive Gupta Empire. In the northern and central regions, gold was the primary medium of exchange, while silver and lead coins were minted to meet local needs and to replace the currencies of the Western Kṣatrapas once these areas fell under Gupta control.

Gold coins were minted in at least three locations, each adhering to the standards set by the central royal mint in terms of design and weight. However, exceptions occurred, particularly with coin types that were produced over extended periods, sometimes spanning three decades, and across multiple mints. Notably, certain gold coins minted in large volumes for specific kings—such as the Javelin Type for Samudragupta I, the Archer|Lotus Type for Chandragupta II, and the Horseman Type for Kumāragupta I—demonstrate a wide variety in design and weight over the years. This raises questions about the valuation of these coins in trade: How did merchants and mint officials appraise a gold coin weighing 7.8 g compared to one weighing 8.3 g? Was greater value assigned to heavier coins? What prompted the minting of these heavier coins? The subsequent analysis delves into these queries.

When studying the weights and classifications of each type within the gold coinage of the Gupta kings, eminent scholars such as John Allan and A. S. Altekar primarily focused on the concept of weight standards, i.e., that coins of a certain type were issued to a specific target weight. For example, Altekar proposed a set of weight standards for each of the types that he published in his book on the Gupta gold coins.[1]

As we study the vast number of the Gupta gold coins currently available to us, as well as the weight standards proposed by Altekar, it quickly becomes apparent that trying to fit the coins into a weight standard is highly problematic. Altekar himself struggled with this while working on his corpus. In trying to fit each coin into a neat weight group, he suggested that within each coin type, there were multiple weight standards. For his Archer|Lotus Type, Class II coins of Chandragupta II (lotus reverse), he proposed that the coins were issued to the 121, 124, and 127 grain weight standard.[2] He followed Allan's English grains measurement as a reference when discussing weights, where one grain is equal to 0.06479 grams. So as per Altekar, the Archer|Goddess-on-Lotus coins of Chandragupta II were issued to the weight standard of 7.84, 8.035, and 8.229 grams. Today, with over 1,585 coins of this type and class available for study in the database,[3] we can see that there was a more substantial variation than the three weight

1. Altekar 1957: 41, 46, 91, 96.
2. Altekar 1957: 295.
3. Database maintained by author.

standards proposed by Altekar for this type. In fact, we know that coins with the Chandragupta II, Archer|Lotus reverse can be found in weights as low as 7.28 g (112 grains). What does this mean when we see such variation in weights within the same type? While discussing this anomaly in his corpus, Altekar admits to a wide variation in weights within the same type and variety, and then wrote, "why this should have been the case, we are not in a position to explain."[4]

Over the course of the 223-year reign of the various Gupta kings, their gold coins saw a gradual increase in the weights starting from the low 7 g range to high weights reaching almost 10 g. We also know from various studies and by reviewing the coloration of the gold coins that the later Gupta kings issued their gold coins with lower percentages of gold; scholars were quick to declare the theory of the debasement of the Gupta gold currency because of the declining fortunes of the Gupta Empire.

Mukherjee notes that following the Kuṣāṇas and their successors, "The Guptas struck their gold coins on a weight standard of about 122.9 grains or 7.96 grams."[5] P. L. Gupta and Srivastava also make a similar claim but then contradict themselves, stating that the Gupta rulers followed the Kuṣāṇa weight standards and the Kuṣāṇa coins followed the Roman *aurei,* "the weight of which is seen only on those Roman coins that were struck by moneyers of Augustus (20–19 BC). The weight of the subsequent Roman issues was gradually reduced. The *aurei* of Nero (AD 64) have their point of concentration at 7.3 grams. This shows that there was no precise correspondence between the Roman and Kuṣāṇa dīnāras."[6] Further on, after noting the wide variations seen in the Gupta gold coins, they stated, "It is quite apparent from the above the Gupta gold coins never followed any fixed weight standard." Then they list the assay of some of the gold coins showing a general debasement over the course of the dynasty. Where they got this data and the percentages of gold shown in their table is not known.[7] It is clear from reading the prior discussions on the metrology of the Gupta gold coins that there seemed to be mass confusion regarding a perceived debasement seen on Gupta coinage and sadly a lot of generalization, commentary and assumptions using limited data.

Prior to an in-depth study of the metrology of Gupta coinage, I wondered what the correlation was between the supposed debasement of the gold coins and the true intrinsic value of them in economic transactions. As with all coinage issued for circulation in ancient India, there must have been a consensus as to the weight and intrinsic value of gold dīnāras during each Gupta era; however, without easy access to an accurate way to measure purity, was it possible that the dīnāras were taken at face value? We know that gold dīnāras were not the medium of daily economic activity and were mostly reserved for transactions of higher value (purchase of land, donations, tribute etc.). One can only assume that these gold coins were not being weighed daily to determine their economic value, but rather, as we see in the inscriptions from that time, the kings and the population regarded the dīnāras as a fixed unit value (regardless of variation in weight).

The Gadhwa Stone Inscription of Chandragupta II of GE 88 (AD 407), mentions that a gift of ten dīnāras for the maintenance of an alms-house was given by the king. The Dāmodarpur copper plate inscription of Viṣṇugupta from GE 224 (AD 543) describes a gift of fifteen dīnāras for the purchase of land equaling five *kulyavāpas* for the establishment of a temple. When we review the Gupta inscriptions from that time, we do not ever see the inscriptions mention that one *kulyavāpa* of land was equal to three dīnāras issued by a

4. Altekar 1957: 296.
5. Mukherjee 1990: 16.
6. Gupta and Srivastava 1981: 3.
7. Gupta and Srivastava 1981: 4.

specific king; i.e., they did not say that the dīnāras they will accept needed to be only the ones which looked like they had better gold color, or that they should be the dīnāras issued only by Samudragupta I or Chandragupta II or Kumāragupta I, etc. We only see the Gupta era inscriptions mention that X number of dīnāras was donated for a specific charitable or religious purpose.[8] So how did the population accept gold dīnāras that had a wide variation in weights and assumed variations in the gold purity?

Using a few coins from the British Museum collection as a subset, and the analysis done by various researchers over the past decade—Walker, Allan, Cunningham, as well as Guha and Maity (1956)—the data all point to a gradual debasement of Gupta dīnāras over the course of ca. 223 years. But since the Gupta inscriptions only refer to the gold dīnāras as a fixed unit with a fixed value, how do we reconcile the fact that the gold coins of Samudragupta I have an average gold purity of 83.28% and the coins of Kumāragupta III are highly debased with a gold purity of 59.12%? Even the color of the gold coins is clearly different to the naked eye. As is clearly seen the percentage value of Gupta gold coins in the following pages, the debasement of gold coinage was gradual. Should we assume that the goldsmiths would have assigned a higher economic value to the gold coins issued by the earlier Gupta kings? It may not have been possible for the average person to confirm the gold purity of the gold coins, but the coins clearly show a debasement, so what was really going on at that time? Would a land transaction as noted in the Gupta inscriptions work with these debased dīnāras?

In reviewing the papers and data published over the past century, I found that Allan, Cunningham, and Walker's metal analysis was quite meaningless. Over the course of five years, S. K. Maity managed to study select Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coins in the British Museum (Allan coin numbers 1–77 only), the Indian Museum Kolkātā, and the Bhuri Singh Museum, South Kolkātā, which he published in multiple issues of *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* from 1956–1960. He observed that while it was clear from visual inspection that the color of the gold coins varied over time from yellowish in color, to reddish to blackish, leading him to believe that some of the gold coins were alloyed with silver (Ag), some were alloyed with copper (Cu), and some were alloyed with both. Then using the specific gravity method, he calculated the corresponding gold percentage. The gold purity percentage as calculated by Maity, while good for general observations and trend analysis, was in fact not accurate enough to pinpoint the true gold percentage within the coins.

In 1970 Andrew Oddy published his paper, "A Reappraisal of the Specific Gravity Method for analysis on Gold Alloys," which established that the specific gravity data was not fully accurate as a measure when analyzing the gold content on alloyed coins, especially the Gupta coins which were alloyed with not only silver, but also with copper. This combination of silver and copper grossly distorts the final value for gold percentage, especially as coins struck over a long 223-year period could and did have varying amounts of silver and copper as alloy. In fact, the average copper content in gold coins up to those struck by Narasiṁhagupta I is 4.86%. Prior to and including the reign of Skandagupta, the copper content in the gold coins stayed under 5% except for the Skandagupta Archer Type, Var. B *Kramāditya* coins which show an 8.19% copper content (XRF analysis). As Oddy showed in his paper, the presence of just 5% copper within the gold alloy can distort the gold percentage of the coin by 3.3% lower than the true percentage, i.e., the gold percentage derived from the specific gravity method for a gold coin with a copper content of 5% will need to be adjusted upwards by 3%.[9]

8. Arlo Griffiths 2018. "Four More Gupta-Period Copperplate Grants from Bengal." *Pratna Samiksha: a Journal of Archaeology*, New Series 9:15–57.

9. Oddy 1970: 147–57.

Maity published his specific gravity data in 1958 (pp. 183–88) on the Indian Museum Kolkātā collection. Maity used the coin reference numbers from the Indian Museum Catalogue published by Vincent Fleet in 1906. B. N. Mukherjee and Srivastava also published some limited data in the 1981 book on Gupta gold coins in the Indian Museum (IM) Kolkātā (TIG 1981) but sadly this was a very poor attempt. Not only did the book lack in detail and provided virtually zero analysis of the coins, they also only cataloged a very limited number of the Gupta coins (one coin for each type) from the IM collection and listed just the Altekar description when describing the coins. Their data on specific gravity was a new study, as their specific gravity values are different than those listed by Maity. One coin from the Indian Museum collection is of immense interest: it is the King and Queen Type, coin number C18087, which I classified for the first time in the first edition of this volume as a new King and Queen Type coin of Chandragupta II. This coin will be discussed in detail later in this section but suffice it to say that this coin is not listed by Fleet in his catalog, and was also not listed by Maity in his 1958 study. I must assume it was added after 1958. So, we have to rely only on the specific gravity data from Mukherjee and Srivastava for this coin; however, I must note here that they did not fully comprehend the relevance of the lower gold percentage for this coin when compared to the other King and Queen Types of Chandragupta I.

P. L. Gupta's data were not used in my analysis because I found it very unreliable. Michael Willis was also very critical of the data published by P. L. Gupta in his book *The Imperial Guptas*. He correctly noted:

> See tables in P. L. Gupta, Imperial Guptas, p. 70 and p. 181. Here I should note that there are problems with the data: the numbers in the two tables do not agree and the size of the corpus examined is not stated, so we do not know if the figures are statistically representative. In addition, the figures have been arranged in a fashion designed to support the argument; the data is thus presented in a polemical rather than a scientific fashion. Scanning the table it does indeed appear that the gold content steadily declines, and this monetary trend favors P. L. Gupta's king sequence. But closer examination shows there is so much overlap that the gold content of the coins is effectively meaningless! [10]

K. K. Maheshwari and Rath published a study on metal analysis of silver coins of Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I *Garuḍa* and Peacock Type coins. The data was published in 1998 and they listed the percentage of silver in each of the different silver coin types and varieties of Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I. While the study was excellent in terms of classification of the silver coins, the study did not include the silver *Madhyadeśa* Type coins of Kumāragupta I or the Trident Type, any silver coins of Skandagupta or Budhagupta (possibly as these other types of coins may not have been readily available to them). The paper also did not list the specific gravity of the coins tested or the process used to determine the data. It just listed the percentage of silver for each of the coin types and varieties listed for classification.

In trying to reconcile the data published by each of these scholars for the Gupta gold coins, it became apparent quickly that while they all relied on the specific gravity method, it was not possible to accurately confirm whether the gold percentage should be calculated using the silver alloy method or the copper alloy method, as both metals were present in the Gupta gold coins.

Further, it was not clear which of these two methods the scholars employed in their data. Using the specific gravity method, it was impossible to tell which of these two metals (Ag or Cu)

10. Willis 2005, n. 54.

was the major component in the gold alloy. For example, should a coin with a specific gravity of 15.9, be considered to have a gold purity of 73.9% (assuming that the rest of the alloy is silver) using the Oddy tables for silver alloy? For example, the Maity data set of eleven coins from the British Museum collection of the King and Queen Type of Chandragupta I shows a wide range of specific gravity (15.4–19.3). The average specific gravity for this BM Maity group is 17.6, which corresponds to a gold purity of 88.3% using the Oddy silver alloy tables. However, in his summary, Maity lists the gold purity of 90.78% for this same group. How he arrived at this number is not known; however, the data set of four coins of Chandragupta I, tested using the XRF analysis yields a gold purity average of 93.08% with a 94.12% high and low of 92.02%, which is substantially more accurate than the specific gravity data.

In further reviewing these different sets of data, it was very clear that while the specific gravity data collected in the past was good for study in the 1950–1960s, there was no consistency in the equipment used or methods of analysis: Maity used a cotton thread, while Walker used a fine iron wire, and each method yielded slightly different results. So, while the prior data was good to understand a general trend, it was clear that a new study was needed, using the very best equipment and technology. In 2016, I commissioned a new study for Gupta gold coins to get a better data set for further analysis. My plan was to try to get the Gupta coins analyzed using X-Ray emission spectroscopy, which is an elemental analysis technique with broad application in science and industry. XRF analysis of metal is based on the principle that individual atoms, when excited by an external energy source, emit X-ray photons of a characteristic energy or wavelength. By counting the number of photons of each energy emitted from a sample, the elements present may be identified and quantified.

This XRF technology has now become standard for determining the composition of metal alloys in industry. By using high quality, properly calibrated equipment it is possible to get excellent results. Of course, the best way to get the exact composition of any coin, would involve a destructive analysis where a portion of the coin is taken off and chemically analyzed. Since this destructive method is not an option for rare and valuable coins from any collection, XRF analysis provided a great option for determining the metal composition with a high degree of accuracy. After discussing this project with many experts in the XRF research field, it was apparent that the best and latest equipment with accurate calibration, coupled with up-to-date software for spectrographic analysis was a must, and by using good controls and multiple scans of the coin, the data should provide us with results worthy of an in-depth study.

For this project, I used the Niton X3t XRF analyzer provided by Thermo Fisher Scientific. This unit was calibrated prior to use for each session and was also updated with the latest internal software for precious metals analysis. The unit was also recalibrated every time it was powered down during the day as well as tested against a control sample on a regular basis during the day to confirm that it was continuing to analyze accurately.[11] As the XRF analyzes the surface of the coin, it is important to fire the X-rays for a longer time, because the longer scan will yield results with substantially higher accuracy. For this study, each coin was subjected to five individual scans of 10 seconds each (recommended time from the manufacturer is 7–10 seconds). Of the five total scans per coin, two scans were made of the obverse of the coin, two scans of the reverse, and one scan was taken of the edge of the coin. These readings were monitored, and if any scans exhibited a substantial variation (over 1% from previous values),

11. Standard samples for gold and silver were provided by Thermo Fisher and the unit was calibrated each time against the reference samples to confirm that the reading was same as the known metal content of the standard samples. These samples establish a baseline to which the XRF Analyzer is tested and adjusted if necessary prior to use.

the coin was rescanned to confirm.[12] These five readings were then averaged to reach a result that could be studied. Each scan was in a different spot on the obverse and reverse.

The XRF spectrographic analysis yields the primary metal composition of the coin, providing values for other elements as well. Only the primary alloyed metals registering over 1% are listed below, and these gold coins analyzed were primarily alloyed with silver and copper. In the following tables, the number shown for gold, silver, and copper percentages does not always total 100%. This difference is the additional impurities detected such as iron, tin, or lead, and have been left off the list unless the scans detected an anomaly with higher readings (>1%), and then this is discussed specific to the coin. The coin group subjected to this study included the Gupta gold, silver, copper, and lead coins as well as a few coins of the kings that followed the Gupta dynasty in the east. As part of this groundbreaking study, XRF analysis was done on an additional set of 150 silver coins of the Western Kṣatrapas, as well as on a small group of 30 coins of the three-dot variety that were incorrectly identified earlier by scholars as issued by Śrīgupta (by Mitchiner), but in fact are Multan coins (from the Alex Fishman collection). It was necessary to include the Kṣatrapa silver coins in this study (which covered all the Kṣatrapa kings), as I felt it was very important to see how their silver percentage varied over the years and especially during the last 20–25 years during which time they were under continuous siege by Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I.

The following pages list the XRF data from the group of coins tested, as well as the data from Maity and Mukherjee. As the group tested did not include the full range of the Gupta dynasty coins, it was important to reference the other data to try to get as complete a picture of the entire coinage of the Gupta Dynasty. Keep in mind that the XRF analysis result from this group tested is substantially more accurate than the results using the specific gravity method (Maity, Mukherjee). Also, as Oddy pointed out, the specific gravity method needs to account for a +3.3% value added to the specific gravity gold percentage calculation as gold coins do include at least 5% copper (as seen in this study for coins up to Skandagupta). After Kumāragupta I, the copper alloy percentage starts increasing in gold coins. Therefore, specific gravity data using Oddy tables may not be useful for the later Gupta coins after Skandagupta.

When looking at the data from this study as well as the study done by Maity and Mukherjee, researchers need to be cautious in drawing conclusions based on averages. While average values are good for understanding a trend, it is more important to review the actual detailed data. The problem with the averages is that sometimes they may distort the information based on the data set selected for testing. For example, a museum collection's entire group of coins of a particular king and type, i.e., Chandragupta II *Chhatra* Type coins, may have come from a single hoard and as such such a reading may not be representative of the entire *Chhatra* Type coins which were struck throughout the king's 30+ year reign. While a few of the coin types were struck in very low numbers (e.g., Couch Type, *Apratigha* Type), other coin types such as the Samudragupta Javelin Type, Chandragupta II Archer|Lotus Type, and Kumāragupta I Horseman Type were struck in very large numbers over a course of multiple decades, issued across the empire from regional mints and across varying economic conditions. As such, it is dangerous for scholars to jump to conclusions using metal analysis studies from smaller subsets of coins as that data would only be relevant to that smaller subset. A comprehensive larger group of gold coins will of course provide a substantially truer picture. Therefore, such an average of the gold percentage or an average weight of the coins can sometimes be misleading depending on the selection of the coins tested. For example, the data shows us that the weight

12. I must acknowledge and thank my daughter Shailee Kumar for her assistance with this project. She was instrumental in helping with this study.

of the Archer|Lotus coins issued by Chandragupta II continues to increase over the course of his reign, but that would not be apparent by just looking at the average, nor does such a casual observation shed any light on the amount of gold in these coins at any point of time.

There are varieties of this Archer|Lotus Type that are only found in the lower weights while some varieties are only found in the higher weights. A study of the weights and designs together can provide us with much better insight; however, as I have shown below, the metal composition of the coins also can help provide a better understanding of the data. But that is not enough. It would be incorrect to just view the data from Chandragupta Archer Type coins to reach conclusions. Each subgroup needs to be viewed individually, i.e., are the coins with the Archer-Throne reverse different than the coins of the Archer|Lotus group? Do the coins with the obverse symbols in the Archer|Lotus group have different metal compositions than the rest of the Archer|Lotus group and *if it is different, what does that tell us*?

6.2. Kuṣāṇa Coinage

Prior to diving into the new data from the XRF analysis, it will be helpful to first review the Kuṣāṇa gold coin metal metrology. For this purpose, both Joe Cribb and Robert Bracey of the

Dates	King	Au Coins Wt. Range (g)	Wt. Adj. for Denom. (g)[1]	Avg. SG	Au% per Oddy Tables	Actual Au per Coin (g)
113–127	Wima Kadphises	1.90–15.94	7.82	18.89	97.3%	**7.61**
127–151	Kaniśka I	1.98–8.0	7.83	18.97	97.9%	**7.66**
151–190	Huviśka	1.95–7.98	7.90	18.68	96.0%	**7.58**
190–230	Vasudeva I	1.73–8.17	7.86	18.62	95.3%	**7.49**
230–247	Kaniśka lI	1.97–8.09	7.42	17.04	83.5%	**6.20**
245–270	Piruz I	1.93–7.94	7.75	15.98	74.8%	**5.80**
247–267	Vasiśka	1.89–7.95	7.79	17.47	87.5%	**6.82**
267–270	Kaniśka III	1.87–7.94	7.79	17.63	88.3%	**6.88**
267–300	Vasudeva II	1.99–7.95	7.84	17.42	86.7%	**6.80**
270–300	Hormizd I	1.64–8.03	7.48	15.25	67.2%	**5.03**
300–303	Hormizd II	7.82	7.82	15.44	69.2%	**5.41**
300–305	Mahi	7.67 7.85	7.81	16.07	75.8%	**5.92**
303–330	Piruz II	7.92	7.92	15.49	70.1%	**5.55**
305–335	Shaka	1.52–7.93	7.68	14.70	62.0%	**4.76**
330–365	Varahan	4.71–7.86	7.34	14.51	59.9%	**4.40**
330–365?	Varahran I	7.66–7.69	7.67	14.56	61.0%	**4.68**
335–345	Kirada	7.60–7.84	7.75	14.13	55.3%	**4.28**
335–350	Kipunadha	3.69–7.78	7.55	11.82	23.9%	**1.80**
345–350	Piruz	7.78	7.78	14.21	56.5%	**4.40**
350–390	Kidara	5.29–8.03	7.76	12.50	34.4%	**2.67**

1. All weights equalized to adjust for double-dināras and quarter-dināras. One double-dināra = 2 dināras. Four quarter-dināras = 1 dināra.

Table 6.1. Specific gravity data published by Bracey and Sachs of the British Museum

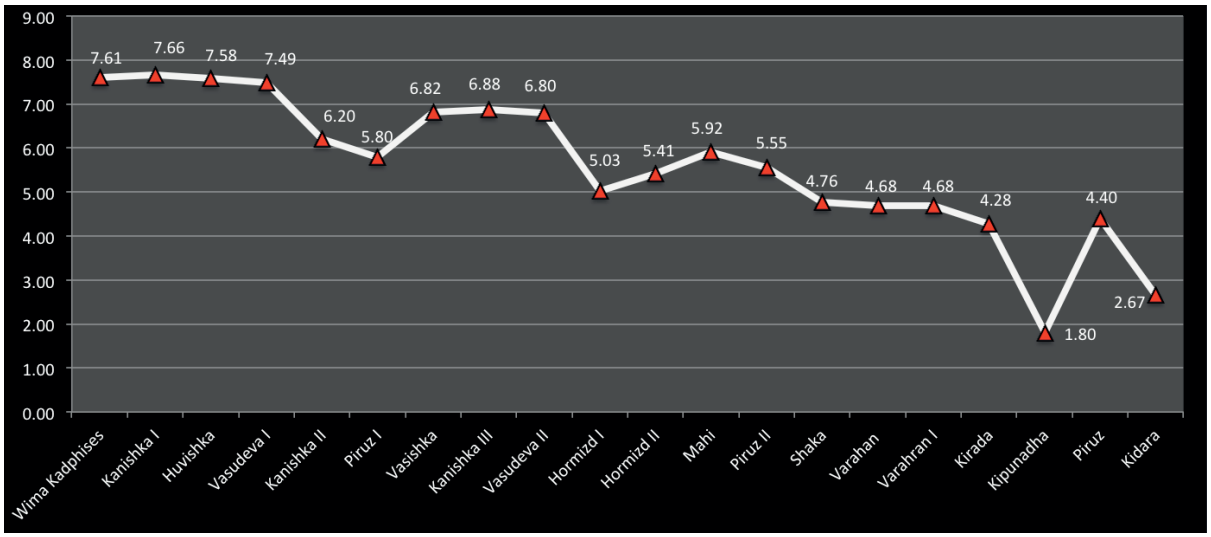


Chart 6.1. Actual gold in Kushan Dīnāras by king. Data equalized for different denominations to one dīnāra weight.

British Museum were very helpful and pointed me the right direction for gathering that data. In studying the data published by Bracey and Oddy on the Kuṣāṇa coinage, it was clear that a gradual debasement of the gold coins took place over the course of the ca. 300 years: Wima Kadphises (AD 113) to Kidara (AD 390).[13] Coins of Wima Kadphises register an average gold percentage of 97.3% vs. coins of Kidara at 34.4%. The weights of their gold coins stayed quite consistent over the course of the dynasty. They did, however, issue gold coins in different denominations: the dīnāra, double-dīnāra, and quarter-dīnāra weights. To study the actual gold value in each of these coins, I equalized the values for the different denominations to equal the weight of one dīnāra. (For double-dīnāras, by dividing the weights in half, and for quarter-dīnāras by multiplying the weights by four). This gave me the relative dīnāra equivalent weight for each coin listed by Bracey along with its corresponding specific gravity. The Oddy table for silver alloy was used throughout all analyses to calculate the corresponding gold percentage numbers for each specific gravity value listed. For example, a quarter dīnāra of Huviśka with a weight of 1.97 g, would translate to a dīnāra equivalent value of 7.90 g. This was done to review the *actual* gold in grams within a dīnāra of the Kuṣāṇa king (regardless of denomination) and then compare that *actual* gold within that king's gold coinage against the other Kuṣāṇa kings. The results are shown below in the graph. It clearly shows us that the Kuṣāṇa kings gradually decreased the actual gold in the Kuṣāṇa dīnāras (Graph 1).

The data confirm that the intrinsic value of these gold dīnāras continued to slowly decline through the course of the ca. 300 years of the Kuṣāṇa rule. Until the end of the reign of Vasudeva II, the purity of the gold coins was still very high (86%) with 6.8 grams of pure gold per one gold Kuṣāṇa dīnāra. However, after Vasudeva II, the gold content of the coins falls substantially. It is important at this point to keep in mind that the timeline of Vasudeva II (AD 267–300) also coincides with the rise of the Gupta Dynasty in the eastern regions of the then-disintegrating Kuṣāṇa empire in India. The date for Chandragupta I's ascent to the throne is in the same time frame, approximately AD 319. Most of the Kuṣāṇa gold in circulation at this time (early fourth century AD) in northern India was of an average gold percentage of 89.7% (the average of the gold coins of Wima Kadphises up to Vasudeva II). The first of the

13. Dates from Cribb 2014.

Gupta coins (King and Queen Type) struck by Chandragupta I shows a higher gold purity of 93.08%.[14]

6.3. Gupta Coinage

The gold coins issued by the earliest of the Gupta kings, starting with Chandragupta I and Samudragupta I, were relatively high in gold purity. In this book, I have suggested that many of the coins attributed to Chandragupta II in fact should be instead attributed to his grandfather Chandragupta I. In the table listing the coin summary by king and type, the data are presented by king and coin type. To study the classification a little better, I have also labeled some of the coin types with specific identifiers. The data of 179 Gupta gold coins tested as part of this study, is shown in the following tables, both summarized ahead. Additional gold coins were also analyzed for gold purity percentage, and this data will be presented separately below. It included the dīnāras that were struck in silver (some with and some without gold plating); these were not summarized in this table as they are obviously copies and not official Gupta issues.

The weights of the Gupta coins varied substantially unlike the coins struck by their predecessors, the Kuṣāṇas. The weight data below incorporates data from my database and the Dīnāra Database of over 6,824 Gupta gold coins, summarized here by king and coin type. The data includes all gold coins, including gold coins that may be of lower-weight due to wear. The reason for including these worn gold coins within this summary is that in addition to the coins that are low in weight and are clearly worn, the database also includes die-struck coins that were struck on very lightweight flans. Some of these low weight coins are in the 6–7 g range, which is substantially lower than the normal weight range of Gupta gold coins. Whether these lower-weight die-struck coins were end of the run coins, or whether they were errors by the mint, the fact remains that they were in circulation, and as such they have been included when calculating the average weights by king and type (but due to small numbers, their effect on the averages should be insignificant).

In the table of the XRF summary below, I have listed the coins by king, sorted by coin type, with average weight and diameter, the gold percentage range (high and low percentage) for that coin type and the average percentage of metal: gold, silver, and copper, within each coin. In this first part of the table, the data for the half-dīnāras are shown as well as the regional issues of the gold coins (issued in the name of or for a Gupta king), such as the *Rājadaṇḍa* Type issued in the name of Samudragupta I, in the northwest regions (Punjāb/northwest frontier provinces) and the *Garuḍa* Type issued in the Dakṣiṇa Kosala region for Kumāragupta I. Since these are regional issues and their circulation was firmly limited to that specific region catering to a local population, the gold purity of these coins is more in line with the local currency it was replacing, i.e., Samudragupta *Rājadaṇḍa* Type (avg. 67.07%) is very close to the gold percent of the coins of Mahi, Piruz II, Shaka, Varahan, and Kirada of the later Kushans, Kuṣāṇo-Sasanians, and Kidarites (avg. 64% across these kings). See section 4.6 for a more-detailed discussion.

These *Rājadaṇḍa* Type gold coins were struck with an average 5.15 g of gold (Table 6.6), translating to a mid point value for coins struck by later Kusanas and Kidarite kings (4.28 –5.92 g; Table 6.1).The Mahi-Kirada coins with an average of 5.0 g of gold in their coins—shows that the *Rājadaṇḍa* Type coins, while low in actual gold as compared to the rest of

14. Also see M. Blet-Lemarquand et al. 2012. "Analyses of the Composition of the Coinage of Arwad (5th–4th Cent. BC)," *Transeuphratène*, 42: 1659–67. Kuṣāṇa data courtesy of Robert Bracey, the British Museum.

the official coins struck at Gupta mints for Samudragupta I, were well within the range of local expectation for a gold coin. The average grams of gold found within the coins issued by the Gupta mints for Samudragupta was 6.29 g. Similarly, the *Garuḍa* Type coins issued for Kumāragupta I in the Dakṣiṇa Kosala region show a gold percentage range of 84.28% to 55.11% and an average of 63.80%. Two coins of Śarabhapurīya kings were also tested (coins 1218 and 1459) and they show an average gold content of 75.72%, demonstrating that the Kumāragupta I coinage that replaced the local Śarabhapurīya coins, was about 12% lower in gold content.

The table and graph shown below summarize the gold percentage value from the XRF analysis and the weight value from the database of over 6,824 gold coins.[15] A few notes regarding the data shown in the Master Table of the XRF data and the specific gravity data from Maity and Mukherjee: the Maity and Mukherjee study was done using differing methods for calculating the specific gravity of the coins. Since not all the Gupta gold coins are available at one place and because access to the Indian Museum collections to perform such an XRF analysis is virtually impossible, the consolidated data shown here seems to be the only way to try to get as full a picture as possible of the entirety of Gupta gold coinage. While both Maity and Mukherjee published their data on the Indian Museum Kolkātā collection, only the actual specific gravity value as calculated by Maity and Guha was used in the table for the BM coins (the 3.3% adjustment upwards to the gold percentage shown in the table may be needed for the data, as Oddy had rightly pointed out). The corresponding gold percentage numbers shown are from the Oddy tables, as they are the most accurate values rather than the gold percentages listed by Maity or Mukherjee. The consolidated number shown in the second to last column is the XRF value. If no XRF gold percentage value was available for a specific coin type, then the average of the Maity and Mukherjee numbers were used if only two specific gravity values are available (for a type). If only one specific gravity value was available for a coin type (i.e., Mukherjee value for Kumāragupta I *Apratigha* Type), then only that value was used.

This gives us for the first time an almost full picture of the metal metrology of the entire coinage of the Gupta dynasty. A few coin types, such as the *Chakravikramaḥ* Type attributed to Chandragupta II, and the *Chhatra*,[16] Horseman and Lion-Slayer Types of Skandagupta were not available to be analyzed at the time of this study as such their XRF values are not yet in this master table. The last column shows the total actual gold in grams found in each coin of the Gupta kings by coin type. This new way of looking at the true gold content of the dīnāras shows us that in fact, while the weights of the Gupta gold coins continued to rise from a low value of 7.55–9.68, the *actual* gold in the coins in grams held steady throughout the ca. 250 years. In fact, for the coins issued by the later Gupta kings including some of the coins of Skandagupta, the actual amount of gold within the dīnāras *increases*. The actual gold weight that a person would

15. As of December 2023, this number was at 6,824. However, this is a fluid number with new coins being discovered and added to the database weekly based on new finds and new collectors bringing new coins to the author's attention.

16. In 2022, Pankaj Tandon published a new paper in *Journal of Oriental Numismatic Society*, no. 250 (Winter), where he presented XRF data based on a new study done by him on 167 Gupta coins and proceeded to compare his results with this study published in 2017. The results from his new study conform fully with my own study, and while the primary goal of his study was to try to find reasons to support his various theories, he reluctantly concludes that his study of the XRF data did not support the attribution of the King and Queen coins to Samudragupta; the attribution of Chandragupta I coins with a throne reverse to Chandragupta II was also not fully supported. This study also did not provide any new evidence to support his theories regarding a new Chandragupta III. His study did include data for the Skandagupta *Chhatra* Type which was not accessible for my own study: Skandagupta *Chhatra* Type, inv. no. 591.08, 8.24 g: Au 67.02%, Ag 24.285%, Cu 8.695%. For some reason, Tandon has labelled this coin as "Low Weight", presumably as this is yet another coin which negates his "heavy weight theory." Regardless, it is important to note that Skandagupta's Chhatra coins are found with a weight of 8.4 g; therefore, this Tandon coin (inv. no. 591.08) is not a low weight coin. This data was later published in the *Festschrift* to Ellen Raven, 2023, p. 57.

yield from a gold dīnāra struck by Narasiṁhagupta, Kumāragupta II, Budhagupta, Prakāśāditya (including the nameless Archer Type coins with the titles of *Parākramadityaḥ* and *Vikramādityaḥ*), and Vainyagupta was in fact higher than the purer gold coins stuck by Chandragupta I, with a gold purity of 94.12% (see Tables 6.6 and 6.9).

The findings detailed in the tables here, fundamentally contradict the theories of currency debasement suggested by scholars, specifically the notion that the Gupta dynasty's currency debasement began during Skandagupta's reign. Altekar, on the one hand, understood that the gold content stayed approximately the same while the weights went up, yet contradicted himself by stating that "it is forgotten that every gold coin in ancient India was accepted at its real value and not its face value."[17] This is incorrect based on the transactions recorded in the inscriptions, discussed earlier.

This increase of the alloy with the gold coin was not a debasement of the currency. Rather, the reverse was true: *the value of the currency did not decrease with the reduction in the percentage of gold due to the increase in the total weight of the coins. Instead, the actual gold content within the coins stays quite constant throughout the Gupta era*. As attested by the inscriptions of the Gupta kings, the purchase of one *kulyavāpa* of land for the price of three dīnāras was not dependent on dīnāras from any specific king. While there was a debasement of the alloy within the coins, it was not a debasement of the currency due to the increase in weight, and it seems to have had no effect on its real economic value.

Since there are differing lines of thought between scholars regarding the Archer|Lotus Type coins with *Chandra* on them as to which Chandragupta (I, II, or III) issued them, I have presented the data below by combining all the Chandragupta coins in one group called Chandragupta—ALL, and in the table below I show the summary for each of the Gupta kings' issues analyzed using the XRF process. However, rather than using the average weight from the test group (as that is a smaller group; on some types it was limited to just a single coin), I used the average weight values from the database which includes over 6,824 coins. These averages by type multiplied by the XRF value for the gold percentage provides the actual amount of gold in grams in the dīnāras. Since scholars continue to argue whether Chandragupta I issued any coins at all or of just the King and Queen Type, or in fact all the coins or most of the coins with *Chandra* on the obverse should be attributed to Chandragupta II, let us for a moment assume this is so and look at the coinage from Samudragupta I onwards. Samudragupta's coins average 6.29 g of gold while Kumāragupta I coins average 6.13 g, a 2.5% reduction in average (not a major enough difference to make the average person take notice when handling the coins). *Compare this to the average under Skandagupta of 6.76 g, a 7.5% increase in the amount of gold within the coins*. In fact, the coins attributed to Prakāśāditya and the nameless coins (also issued possibly by Prakāśāditya) were struck with a higher gold content possibly to seek acceptability as a new king, a king who may not have descended from the royal Gupta line.

The result shows us that once again, the actual amount of gold within the dīnāras held steady throughout the reign of the Imperial Guptas; however, contrary to the established viewpoint, the actual gold increased in coins struck by Skandagupta in the later part of the reign onwards up to the reign of Vainyagupta. This almost constant value of actual gold within the dīnāras also explains why, in the inscriptions concerning land transactions, we see only the reference to the number of dīnāras given or accepted and not whose dīnāras were being used; i.e., the Gupta dīnāras seem to have been universally accepted at face value. As the weights of Gupta dīnāras continued to go up, the gold percentage within these coins stayed quite constant unlike the

17. Altekar 1957: 297.

King	Type	Low Wt.	High Wt.	Database Avg. Wt.	No. of Coins
Chandragupta I	Archer|Goddess on Throne	7.34	7.98	7.72	138
	Couch Type Group I, Goddess seated facing front	7.44	7.81	7.65	8
	King and Queen	7.06	8.03	7.59	186
	King and Queen on Couch	7.34	7.62	7.54	5
	Rājadaṇḍa	7.34	8.03	7.66	13
Samudragupta I	Archer	7.02	7.80	7.53	81
	Aśvamedha	7.19	7.95	7.52	149
	Battle-Axe	7.20	7.99	7.53	89
	Javelin	6.50	7.77	7.56	860
	Lyrist	7.06	7.99	7.62	98
	Lyrist, Variety A (broad flan)	7.06	7.88		88
	Lyrist, Variety B (small flan)	7.56	7.86		10
	Rājadaṇḍa (Regional-Punjāb issue)	7.55	7.77	7.67	23
	Tiger-Slayer	7.19	7.84	7.57	20
Kāchagupta	*Chakradhvaja* Class I	6.90	7.80	7.48	132
	Chakradhvaja Class II with *Garudadhvaja*	7.64	7.80	7.77	5
Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus, half-dināra	3.30	3.68	3.53	3
Chandragupta II	Archer|Goddess on Lotus	7.28	8.40	7.90	1,585
	Archer|Lotus, Sun symbol on obverse	7.87	8.38	8.02	6
	Archer|Lotus, Crescent symbol on obverse	7.87	8.56	8.33	43
	Archer|Lotus, *Chakra* symbol on obverse	8.30	8.60	8.46	26
	Archer|Lotus, Fire Altar symbol on obverse	8.56	9.19	8.65	15
	Archer|Lotus, *Śrīvatsa* symbol on obverse	9.10	9.10	9.10	1
	Chhatra	7.48	8.30	7.78	264
	Chakravikramaḥ	7.45	7.56	7.51	3
	Couch Group 2; Goddess seated sideways	7.68	7.79	7.71	2
	Horseman	6.76	8.30	7.78	306
	King and Queen	8.03	8.03	8.03	1
	Lion-Slayer with Cornucopia	7.21	7.84	7.68	13
	Lion-Slayer with Lotus	7.21	8.27	7.78	262
Kumāragupta I	Archer	7.80	8.22	7.99	507
	Apratigha	7.46	7.97	7.81	18
	Aśvamedha (right: 6 qty.) (left: 6 qty.)	7.92	8.50	8.20	13
	Chhatra Type	7.78	8.04	8.24	6

Table 6.2. Weight range and total quantities by king for Gupta gold dināras

Table 2 (cont'd)

King	Type	Low Wt.	High Wt.	Database Avg. Wt.	No. of Coins
Kumāragupta I (cont'd)	Elephant-Rider	7.88	8.37	8.15	13
	Elephant-Rider|Lion-Slayer	7.50	8.59	8.10	17
	Garuḍa	1.29	1.34	1.30	90
	Horseman	7.79	8.34	8.14	770
	Kārttikeya	8.04	8.33	8.20	99
	King and Queen	8.21	8.21	8.21	1
	Lion-Slayer	7.34	8.24	8.14	152
	Lyrist	7.74	8.17	8.03	4
	Swordsman	7.89	8.16	8.06	24
	Tiger-Slayer	8.09	8.30	8.17	79
	Rhinoceros-Slayer	7.96	8.30	8.15	14
Ghaṭotkachagupta	Archer	8.78	9.51	8.97	2
Skandagupta	Archer, Variety A; Skandagupta reverse	7.85	9.40	8.74	75
	Archer, Variety B; Krāmaditya reverse	7.11	9.50	9.02	200
	Chhatra	8.39	8.42	8.40	5
	Horseman	8.34	9.10	8.72	2
	Garuḍa	1.30	1.33	1.31	5
	King and Lakṣmī	8.16	9.55	8.49	41
	Lion-Slayer	9.12	9.12	9.12	6
Jayagupta	Archer	8 35	8 35	8 35	1
Narasiṁhagupta I	Archer	8 54	10 44	9.44	128
Samudragupta II	Archer	9.30*	9.40*	9.40	1
Kumāragupta II	Archer	8.93	9.40	9.21	33
Budhagupta	Archer	9.21	9.45	9.33	8
Nameless: Vikramādityaḥ	Archer. Name in legend: *Vikramādityaḥ*	8.99	9.53	9.33	55
Prakāśāditya	Archer				1
	Horseman|Lion-Slayer	8.81	9.47	9.32	66
Nameless: Prakramaditya	Archer Type. Name in legend: *Prakramaditya*	9.39	9.46	9 22	3
Chandragupta IV	Archer with Altar symbol	8.56	9.30	8.60	18
Vainyagupta	Archer	9.37	9.59	9.44	5
Narasiṁhagupta II	Archer	9.20	10.40	9.50	56
Kumāragupta III	Archer	9.37	9.80	9.59	40
Viṣṇugupta	Archer	9.10	9.86	9.61	44

King	Au% XRF Value	Avg. Wt. (g)	Actual Au in Coin (g)
Samudragupta	83.28	7.55	6.29
Kāchagupta	80.80	7.63	6.17
Chandragupta (all coins)	81.43	7.85	6.39
Kumāragupta I	75.74	8.09	6.13
Skandagupta	76.19	8.87	6.76
Narasiṁhagupta I	78.08	9.44	7.37
Kumāragupta II	78.52	9.21	7.23
Budhagupta	76.06	9.33	7.10
Prakāśaditya	81.78	9.32	7.62
Nameless Coins: Prakramditya	76.41	9.22	7.05
Nameless Coins: Vikramādityaḥ	75.34	9.33	7.03
Vainyagupta	72.50	9.44	6.84
Kumāragupta III	59.12	9.59	5.67
Viṣṇugupta (Maity specific gravity data)	61.65	9.68	5.97
Viṣṇugupta (Coin **982** XRF value)	20.63	9.10	1.88

* The average weight shown is from the database and includes the average of all gold coins issued by the king.

Table 6.3. Summary of 179 gold coins tested via XRF, arranged by Gupta king*

Kuṣāṇas, thereby helping to create stable currency for good economic growth and trade within the Empire as well as across the trade routes leading to Rome via Egypt. It is also the reason why the Gupta gold coins were so popular as a currency, which led to these being struck in large numbers across various mints spread over the vast Empire.

There are two ways to look at the data published here. One is to accept the XRF data as the only accurate data available so far on the Gupta coins. The second way is to try to use the prior credible specific gravity data combined with the new XRF data to build a complete picture. The gold value (percent of gold within) of Gupta gold currency as issued by the kings from Chandragupta I up to Kumāragupta III was quite constant. We know of coins of Kumāragupta III mostly from the find of the Kalighat Hoard. These coins were buried within a metal vessel, which caused them to be coated with a dark patina over the last ca. 1,500 years due to oxidation. In fact, without the patina, these coins exhibit a good gold color, and their average gold percentage registers at 59.12%. It is only with Viṣṇugupta that the gold coins start to be fully debased. The Maity specific gravity gold percentage value of 61.65% and the fully debased tested specimen of the Viṣṇugupta coin (PC, 1244, coin **982**, is almost a silver finish) confirms that this was one of the last dīnāras struck for the Imperial Guptas, and in fact it was the time when the Dynasty ended. The drop in the gold from 61.65% to 20.63% confirms that during Viṣṇugupta's reign, the royal Gupta treasury was not able to support the production of the gold coins as an acceptable and viable currency supported by an acceptable intrinsic value of gold purity.

	Au% XRF High[1]	Au% XRF Low	Au% XRF Avg.[2]	Db. Avg. Wt. (g)[3]
Chandragupta I[4]	94.12	79.71	87.04	
Samudragupta[5]	92.12	75.63	83.28	7.55
Kāchagupta	83.22	76.28	80.80	7.63
Chandragupta II (all coin types)	90.16	61.59	80.58	7.85
All Chandragupta coin types without Archer obverse symbols	94.12	71.85	82.51	7.84
All Chandragupta Archer Type coins without obverse symbols	89.09	75.16	82.33	7.88
Chandra Archer-Lotus-Sun				8.02
Chandra Archer-Lotus-Crescent	69.14	62.59	66.81	8.33
Chandra Archer-Lotus-*Chakra*	70.66	61.59	66.12	8.46
Chandra Archer-Lotus-Fire Altar			72.93	8.65
Chandra Archer-Lotus-*Śrīvatsa*			71.62	9.10
Kumāragupta I[6]	86.10	65.83	75.74	8.09
Skandagupta	79.10	73.27	76.19	8.87
Narasiṁhagupta I	80.61	75.75	78.08	9.44
Kumāragupta II	79.47	77.58	78.52	9.21
Budhagupta			76.06	9.33
Prakāśāditya			81.78	9.32
Nameless Coins: Vikramādityaḥ	77.27	73.40	75.34	9.33
Nameless Coins: Prakramaditya			76.41	9.22
Vainyagupta			72.50	9.44
Kumāragupta III			59.12	9.59
Viṣṇugupta Maity[7]			61.65	9.68
Vainyagupta debased[7]			20.63	9.10

[1] Au% XRF High Value is the highest value recorded from coins of that specific type.
[2] XRF values shown are from the test group values only and do not include at past specific gravity data.
[3] Database Average weight shown is from the Dināra Database and is the average for all coins of the king or type.
[4] This includes the Archer|Throne, King and Queen, King on Couch, *Rājadaṇḍa* Types as per classification provided in the present volume. However, the database was created prior to this book, and all Chandragupta Archer coins are recorded as Chandragupta II as such coin data is not yet differentiated between Chandragupta I and II.
[5] Data excludes the regional issues: *Rājadaṇḍa*/Punjāb Type coins.
[6] Data excludes the regional issues: *Garuḍa* Type coins.
[7] Maity data on this one coin type is included here for a reference only. The single Vishnugupta coin tested is highly debased as is evident from its almost silver finish. However, I am aware of other Vishnugupta coins, and have handled them personally, to know that this one specimen is not representative of his entire coinage. Other Vishnugupta coins were not available for XRF testing but exhibit a richer gold appearance and can support the Maity value of 61.65% gold, which is added here as an additional reference. A specimen was recently seen in trade with a weight of 8.57 g, but it was a cast specimen and as such has not been considered here.

Table 6.4. Summary of Au%, arranged by king

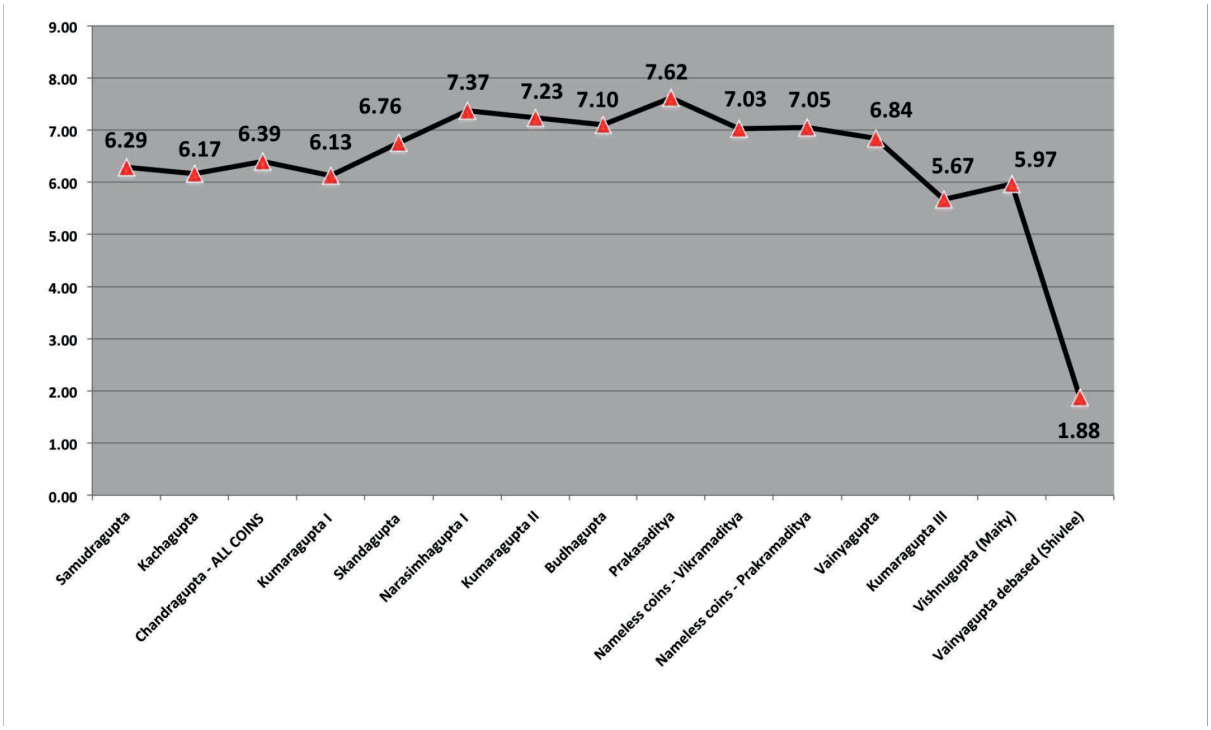


Chart 6.2. Actual gold (g) in Gupta coins using XRF gold percentage and database value for weights..

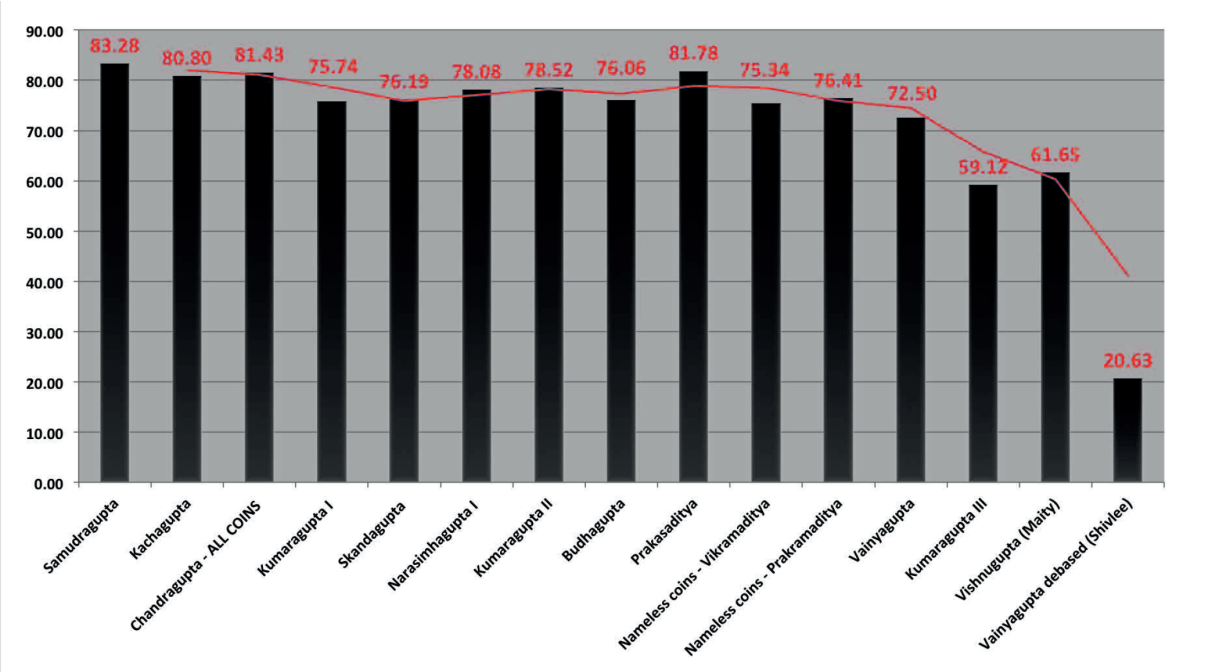


Chart 6.3. Percentage of gold in Gupta gold coins by king (XRF: moving average).

6.3. The Archer Type Coins of Chandragupta with Sun, Crescent, Chakra, Fire Altar, and Śrīvatsa Obverse Symbols

The study below discusses an anomaly seen on a subset of coins within the large group of Archer Type coins which were issued with the name *Chandra* under the king's left arm, along with an innovative new symbol added to the design. This symbol was usually present in the upper left quadrant on the obverse. Initially, it was assumed that these may have been issued by a new king who had reused the illustrious ancient name Chandragupta. In the first edition of this book, even I considered the possibility that a few of these coins may have been struck by a Chandragupta III, who came to power for a short time after Kumāragupta I. Recent scholarship has attempted to address this issue.[18] Tandon proposed a few such gold coins may be in issues of a legitimate son of Purugupta, who may have taken on the name Chandragupta and built on this theory to attribute additional coins to this king to the point where he had painted a picture of a highly powerful new king—Chandragupta III—who according to him was credited with issuing a massive number of gold coins, within multiple coins types and varieties, with varying styles and innovative new designs. Such a new king would have had to have the control of the Gupta throne as well as the multiple mints spread out across the far reaches of the empire, plus the control of the royal treasury to achieve such a lofty goal.

In September 2023 I published a paper, "The Misunderstood Coinage of Chandragupta II of the Gupta Dynasty: A Rebuttal," in the *Festschrift* dedicated to Ellen Raven. This paper, among other issues, addressed this theory of a new Chandragupta III, who, according to scholars, was a claimant to the Gupta throne in the void left by Kumāragupta I and prior to Skandagupta. Discussion from this important paper is presented below as context for the reader.

The primary goal of Tandon's papers seemed to be to prove the existence of a very minor king called Chandragupta III and to place him immediately after the reign of Kumāragupta I. Prior to Tandon, B. P. Sinha, Nisar Ahmad, P. L. Gupta, and Ellen Raven had all opined on these coins. Raven concluded that the coins with obverse symbols were issued according to "the order of Chandragupta III, another son of Kumāragupta I between AD 450–455."[19] P. L. Gupta summarized his thoughts in his paper as, "there did exist Chandragupta III in the Gupta dynasty, hitherto not known from any source. His place lies definitely between Budhagupta and Vainyagupta, as was earlier presumed by me; and he was never close to Kumāragupta I, as was presumed by Sinha; nor did he exist between Prakāśāditya and Narasiṁhagupta, as was suggested by Nisar Ahmad."[20] Nisar Ahmad rejected P. L. Gupta's conclusion. Ahmad concluded that the coins with the *chakra* and crescent were issued by a Chandragupta III who is placed

18. Tandon 2013, 14a, b; 2016; 2020a.
19. Raven 1989: 441–48.
20. P. L. Gupta 1981: 43.

between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, and the Fire Altar Type coins were issued by a Chandragupta IV whom he placed between Skandagupta and Kumāragupta II,[21] but I place them concurrent to Narasiṁhagupta I based on the weights and gold purity.

First and foremost, there is no epigraphical evidence to confirm the existence of a new king called Chandragupta III. In an earlier paper, Tandon ties this Chandragupta III to Purugupta (who was a son to Kumāragupta I and a stepbrother to Skandagupta).[22] In his 2013 and 2020 papers, Tandon did not address the critical point that all epigraphical evidence available today refers to Purugupta as *Mahārājadhirāja Śrī Purugupta*, in all the official Gupta genealogies on the known seals and inscriptions, and never by the name "Chandragupta" (III). Without such corroborating evidence for Purugupta taking on a new name Chandragupta (III), this proposed identification of a new king has no material basis.

The Gupta kings were very proud of their genealogy. They were masters of propaganda and did not hesitate in proclaiming their achievements; this is evident from the legends on their coinage as well as the extensive range of inscriptions documenting their feats, donations, and accomplishments. If, indeed, Purugupta had assumed the illustrious name of Chandragupta (III), later Gupta kings (his children and grandchildren) would have proudly referred to him by the new assumed name, as they did for their other ancestors in each of their inscriptions. As can be seen in the Bhitarī seal of his grandson Kumāragupta III, the only name used for his grandfather is simply Purugupta.[23] Also, it is important to note the absence of evidence, either epigraphical or numismatic, which shows that Purugupta ever ruled over any part of the Gupta Empire. No gold coins with his name have come to light so far, either.[24] Table 6.4 lists the Gupta kings with their official royal titles.[25]

Table 6.4. Gupta kings and their gold coinage

King	Ruled	Gold Coins Known
Mahārāja Śrī Gupta	AD 269–294	–
Mahārāja Śrī Ghatotkāca	Prior to AD 319	–
Mahārājadhirāja Chandragupta I	AD 319–343	309
Mahārājadhirāja Samudragupta I	AD 344–378	1,153
Mahārājadhirāja Rāmagupta (Kāchagupta)	AD 378–382	130
Mahārājadhirāja Chandragupta II	AD 383–412	2,336
Mahārājadhirāja Kumāragupta I	AD 409–450	4,042
Rājarāja Ghatotkāchagupta	AD 453	3
Mahārājadhirāja Skandagupta	AD 448–468	296

21. Ahmad 1994: 58.
22. Tandon 2013.
23. Kumar 2017: 66.
24. Thaplyal 2012.
25. Royal titles used by Gupta kings are as follows: *Rājarāja*, governor/minor king; *Mahārāja*, king over a small region; *Mahārājadhirāja*, king of kings/emperor. Ghatotkāchagupta was a younger brother of Kumāragupta I and posted as a governor in Vidiśā, which was an important political and trading centre in antiquity. In Fishman and Todd's forthcoming book, *The Silver Coinage of the Gupta Empire and Associated States in Western India*, they list a solitary silver *Madhyadeśa* Type coin of Purugupta, with a crude date read by the authors as GE 137 (CE 456). Fishman and Todd are correct when they suggest that this solitary silver coin of Purugupta, along with the solitary silver coin of Ghatotkācagupta, were issued in their capacity as a viceroy (governor) in Vidiśā with royal ambitions.

The only suggestion of the existence of such a minor king, referred to by modern scholars as a Chandragupta III, is based on speculative observations by numismatists who proposed this solely based on a few Archer|Lotus Type coins which had been previously attributed to Chandragupta II.[26] This small group of Archer|Lotus Type coins feature the king's name *Chandra* and an additional symbol (such as a crescent, sun, *chakra*, *Śrīvatsa*, or fire altar) in the upper-left quadrant on the obverse. Additionally, these coins also tend to weigh slightly more than the (Chandragupta II) Archer Type coins without a symbol on obverse. Numismatists focused on this new symbol, considered them to be an innovation, and suggested that these may have been struck by a new and later Chandragupta. Starting with a false assumption, circular reasoning made it easy to conclude that a new king could have existed after Chandragupta II, and such a new king must have issued the coins with such symbols.[27]

A reader without in-depth knowledge of the Gupta gold coinage may assume that these obverse symbols started to appear on the gold coins after Kumāragupta I (after AD 450), as Tandon seems to suggest. In fact, a careful study of the Gupta coinage would confirm that the mints were using such symbols on lead, copper, and gold coins starting from the earliest coins struck for Gupta kings. The crescent is present on the obverse as a common feature on coin designs struck for Chandragupta I[28] as well as Samudragupta I, as early as AD 343, (Javelin Type Class II, Variety C, D, and Archer Type Class I, Variety B, C, and Class II, Variety A).[29]

The King-and-Queen Type coins[30] of Chandragupta I also show such a symbol on the obverse. While making his point, Tandon presented one such coin in his figure 2 (coins 63, 122), but he seems to have ignored this crescent symbol which is prominently visible on these same coins (even though he suggests that the coin was issued by Samudragupta I and not Chandragupta I).[31] It is important to also note that all these King and Queen Type coins of Chandragupta I with an obverse symbol were struck at least 60–100 years before the proposed timeline by Tandon for this new Chandragupta III.

With this discussion on the obverse symbols, a few important questions arise: what do these symbols represent, what is their significance, and how is the appearance of these symbols on the gold coins relevant within the context of Gupta history? Tandon did not address these questions, but understanding the reason for their existence on the obverse is important to solving such questions.

There are five symbols seen on the obverse: sun, crescent (crescent represents a Śaivite influence; sun/moon represents a permanence for the king),[32] *chakra* (the wheel of law), fire altar (this should be referred to as a *Yajña kuṇḍa* as it is not depicted as a tall column holding a fire receptacle, rather as a short *Agnī kuṇḍa* for the Vedic *yajña* fire ceremony (the Sasanian/Iranian fire altar is a tall device on a stand or column as is seen on the Sasanian coinage), and *Śrīvatsa* (the mark of Lord Viṣṇu, which was the official religion of the Gupta king.

When studying the weights of the Gupta gold coins, the three graphs ahead will be very helpful. They highlight coins with an obverse symbol in context of the entire Chandragupta Archer|Lotus coinage. The graphs ahead show us the gold purity and time frame in which these coins were most likely issued. In the following tables, the range of weights will show that the average weights of the coins stayed between 7.45 and 8.28 g for a period of over 130 years,

26. Gupta 1981; Ahmad 1994.

27. Gupta 1981.

28. For a discussion on the appearance of the crescent and crescent standard on Gupta coins, see pp. 64, 93.

29. The crescent is seen on the coins of Chandragupta I.

30. Scholars are mixed on their opinion on whether these King-and-Queen Type coins were issued by Samudragupta I or his father, Chandragupta I. See the discussion ahead in Chapter 9.

31. The crescent symbol is found on gold coins struck by each of the imperial Gupta kings.

32. Kumar 2017: 40.

Figure 6.1. Sun. CI, 586.3. 7.91 g.

Figure 6.2. *Chakra*. PC, 1397. 8.52 g.

Figure 6.3. Crescent. PC, 1395. 8.43 g.

Figure 6.4. *Śrīvatsa*. PC, 1113. 9.08 g.

Figure 6.5. Fire altar (*Yajña kuṇḍa*).
PC, 1396. 8.60 g.

covering the reigns of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta I, Kāchagupta, Chandragupta II, and Kumāragupta I.

These five auspicious symbols are part of a vast range of symbols used for representing various aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism and are prominently seen in the seals, art, and sculptures from the Kuṣāṇa-Gupta period. The addition of such symbols represents certain aspects of dharma and religious affinity, and their religious significance is discussed in full detail in chapter 2, "Evolution of Design Elements on Gupta Gold Coins."[33] In fact, the entire range of imagery on these gold coins has religious parallels. The various poses of the king on the obverse represents imagery codified in Hindu sculptures for the various avatārs/incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu and Śiva, many of which are subliminally represented on these gold coins, such as *Parasu-Rāmaavatara*—the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu, i.e., Rāma with the battle-axe. On the Battle-Axe Type coins, the king holds the battle-axe with a *vamāna*—the dwarf—as the *Audhpurush* (personification of *chakra*) or as the fifth incarnation of Viṣṇu. The battle-axe is also seen as an attribute of Śiva in his various renditions. *Rāmachandraavatara* (the seventh incarnation of Viṣṇu, Rāma) appears on an Archer Type where the king is shown identical to the attributes of iconography of Rāma: he stands in a *Tribhaṅga* pose, holding an arrow in his right

33. For detailed discussion on religion and religious iconography during the Gupta age, see pp. 32–79.

hand and a bow in his left hand. Lakṣmī-Narayna, a representation of Viṣṇu sitting with one of his legs hanging down and one leg folded up next to his consort Lakṣmī, is seen on the King and Queen on Couch Type coin struck by Chandragupta I.

The *chakra* (*Dharmachakra*, or Wheel of Law),[34] like the crescent, is seen on earliest Gupta lead and copper coins as a full circular disk with eight spokes issued by Rāmagupta[35] and as a *Chakradhvaja* (*chakra* standard) as seen on the coins of Kāchagupta. Such symbols were in use on Gupta coinage up to six decades before the appearance of such a symbol on the obverse of the gold coins issued for Chandragupta III.[36] Similarly, the crescent, *chakra*, and *Śrīvatsa* are visible from the earliest Gupta coins. Therefore, these symbols were not new innovations heralding or signifying issues of a new king, as Tandon seems to suggest.

In Tandon's 2013 paper, he addressed each of the five different symbols found on the obverse of these Archer coins.[37] In the 2020 paper, however, he classified only three out of these five symbol coin varieties (crescent, sun, *chakra*) as issues of Chandragupta III and further added a completely new group of coins which show the king with wearing either belt/sash/sword; he considered these varieties as "heavy weight" coins, even though they do not have any symbols on the obverse. In sum, Tandon asserts that coins with an average weight of 8.22 g were issued by Chandragupta III,[38] who came to power immediately after Kumāragupta I. But Tandon omits the very important Archer|Lotus coins with the *Śrīvatsa* symbol on the obverse (Fig. 6.4). In fact, his 2013 paper included a substantial discussion of how the *Śrīvatsa* coins are linked, but in this latest paper he omitted this theory, which had become problematic for his argument, which I will address below.

Tandon is inconsistent in his current paper when trying to explain why the coin with the altar symbol on the obverse should not be included as an issue of this new king.[39] As these altar-symbol coins do not fit into Tandon's new king theory, he relies on the argument of a gradual increase in the weight of the coins. As these altar coins are much heavier than the others which he had attributed to Chandragupta III, he dismissed these completely: "Although the Altar coins are included here, as they conventionally are attributed to Candragupta III, there may be a case to reassign them to the Hun."[40] Later, Tandon contradicts himself by stating, "I have excluded the Altar variety because, as mentioned earlier, I am not sure they are all issues of Candragupta III. Stylistic differences in those coins from all the others suggest the possibility that they are Hun issues. Including them would not change any of the following analysis, however."[41] Including the altar-symbol coins in the weight analysis does create problems for Tandon's theory, and more importantly, there is no conventionally accepted theory for assigning these to "the Hun." In fact, this is a theory originating solely with Tandon, and he now refers to it within the paper as an accepted fact.[42]

34. The symbol also is similar to a *Vyajana*, a fan-like object seen in contemporary sculptures.

35. The eight spokes represent the eightfold path of Jainism. Rāmagupta was an ardent supporter of Jainism as well. The *Garuḍadhvaja* seen on his copper coins confirms his Vaiṣṇavite faith. See Kumar 2017, pp. 226–31.

36. Tandon's proposal that these symbols were issued for Chandragupta III after the end of Kumāragupta I's reign is therefore incorrect.

37. In keeping with the latest research while writing my manuscript for this chapter in 2014, I referenced Tandon's attribution for such coins as issues of possibly another king than Chandragupta II; based on new analysis in this paper, that attribution will be amended.

38. See Tandon 2020, p. 27, fig. 32. However, Raven maintains that there is evidence that mints under Chandragupta II continued to strike coins in the 8.2 g range, contrary to Tandon's assertion; his inclusion of her Group 9 coins (Belted group) as issues of Chandragupta III is problematic; Ellen Raven, personal comm., 7 June 2020.

39. It is important to note that this symbol referred to as an altar in prior publications should really be referred to as a *Yajña* as it is not the tall fire altar shown on Sasanian coinage.

40. Tandon 2020: 15, n. 30.

41. Tandon 2020: n. 34.

42. Kumar 2017: 235. "The design of the obverse of these Archer|Altar Type coins is more in line with the designs seen on coins struck by the Gupta mints (as opposed to the designs seen on the Hūṇa issues of the Nameless Archer coins), the King stands in a Gupta style *Tribhaṅga* pose."

It is important to point out also that Tandon eliminated these Altar coins based on stylistic differences. Earlier in his own paper, however, he disregarded stylistic differences as worthwhile criteria when disputing the Archer|Goddess on Throne coins. These stylistic differences form the basis for understanding the evolution of the first six decades of iconographic evolution at the Gupta mints for the new innovative designs with deep hidden meaning, as seen on the vast coinage from that time and therefore must be considered in such analysis for attribution of coins to a specific timeline or issues of a specific king.

While disputing any evolutionary links seen between the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coin designs, Tandon compared "a late Kushan coin" ("Coins of Shaka," his fig. 2, also shown below in Fig. 6.6, D), and stated that "these early coins represent significant departures from the Kushan prototype," but a review of Fig. 6.6 makes it evident that this is not the case. Additionally, the two Gupta coins Tandon illustrated within his own paper (2020, figs. 1–2) disprove his point as well. Each of the three coins he had illustrated in his figs. 1–2 (King and Queen Type, coin 59; Shaka Fig. 6.6, D; Samudragupta I-Javelin Type, coin 122), each shows an adherence to the stiff figure seen on Kuṣāṇa coinage. While Tandon chose to include a specific Shaka coin to demonstrate linkage with Kuṣāṇa coins, he omitted other coins and sculptures which do show clear links and would have contradicted his argument as shown in Fig. 6.6.

To further drive his point, Tandon further summarizes incorrectly:

> On the topic of the design, Kumar mentions the evolution of the Goddess from being seated on a throne to being seated on a lotus. However, on no coins of Samudragupta does the Goddess appear on a lotus. Thus, it is not at all clear how the evolution of the design serves as a justification for assigning the Goddess on Throne coins to Candragupta I. The Archer and Couch Types represent significant departures from the Kushan prototype and cannot serve as evolutionary links between the Kushan and Gupta coinages. The best possibility rests with the rather rare Sceptre (or *Rājadaṇḍa*) Type. But a glance at all the coins of this type in Kumar's catalogue, and even all the other ones I have seen, tells us that these also could not serve as the earliest Gupta coins *because they depict the king wearing a tunic whose design has evolved away from the buttoned tunic seen on both coins of Figure 2.*

This statement is false, as the evolution of the lotus is very clearly documented on the coins of Samudragupta I; e.g., Battle-Axe Type coins of Samudragupta I show the addition of a full-bloom lotus below the goddess in Fig. 2.33 D and E and are discussed in step-by-step detail (section 2.8). Omission of such an important design evolution and dismissing it proves to be fatal to his argument.

As for the argument regarding the "buttoned tunic" seen on the obverse, Tandon's assertion is that such a "buttoned tunic" design as illustrated by him using a Shaka coin in his fig. 2 (Fig. 6.6, D) had later evolved into a new tunic style without buttons as an innovation during the Gupta era. Therefore, per Tandon, the Chandragupta I Scepter-*Rājadaṇḍa* Type coins cannot be a precursor to the Samudragupta coins as the *Rājadaṇḍa* coins show a tunic without buttons (Fig. 6.6 H). Sculptural evidence seen in Fig. 6.6, L–M contradicts such an assertion proving the statement to be factually incorrect.

The tunic design without buttons was a common clothing design seen on sculptures from Kuṣāṇa coins and Gandharan art to Mathurā school of art, throughout the Kuṣāṇa era. In fact, both Göbl and Rosenfield make it a point to show the tunic style with and without such ornamentation.[43] Long or short tunics, with or without buttons, studs, or jewels, were a mainstay of Gandharan and

43. Göbl figs. 7, 9; Rosefield figs. 12, 13, 22, 59, 109.

A: Wima Kadphises, AD 113–127, Tunic has no buttons.
B: Kanishka I, AD 127–151, Mathurā. Tunic has no buttons.
C: Vasudeva I, AD 190–230, Mathurā. Tunic has buttons/studs/scale armor.
D: Shaka, AD 305–335, Malakand, Pakistan. Tunic has buttons. Tandon fig. 2 coin.
E: Magra, Early 4th century AD, found in Malakand, Pakistan. Tunic has no buttons.
F: Chandragupta I, UP, India. King-Queen-on-Couch Type, tunic w/buttons/studs/jewels.
G: Chandragupta I, Archer Type, studs/jewels on neckline, tunic body and pants.
H: Chandragupta I, *Rājadaṇḍa* Type, studs/jewels on neckline and pants.
I: Samudragupta I, Javelin Type, short tunic, jewels at neckline.
J: Samudragupta I, Javelin Type, long tunic, buttons/studs/jewels across entire body.
K: Kuṣāṇa 2nd century AD, Buner district, Pakistan. Short Kuṣāṇa tunic, no buttons.
L: Kuṣāṇa era, Mathurā. Prince portrait, short tunic, jewels at neckline, belt, no buttons.
M: Kuṣāṇa era, Mathurā. Princely portrait, short tunic, no buttons/jewels, belt.

Figure 6.6. Kuṣāṇa and Gupta coin obverses compared to Kuṣāṇa sculptures.

Mathurā art, and this Indo-Scythian costume style was prominent in Kuṣāṇa art. Gold and bronze coins of Kanishka I, Huvishka, and Vasudeva I which show the kings full figure are commonly found in and around the Mathurā, UP region of India. If Tandon's assertion is that Shaka coins with buttons are relevant, then Magra coins without buttons are also relevant because coins of Shaka and Magra are found together in hoards but in the Malakand/Swat, Pakistan region. Kuṣāṇa sculptures and coins clearly show that the "no button tunic" was not a later Gupta innovation.

Kuṣāṇa coins such as the Shaka coin shown by Tandon were only issued by the later Kuṣāṇas Mahi, Shaka, Kipunadha, and are limited in circulation to the Taxila region and such coins never circulated in or found in the Uttar Pradesh region of India, where the earliest Gupta kings emerged as a power. Therefore, a Shaka coin cannot not be used as a design reference when discussing or discrediting the evolutionary links between the Kuṣāṇa prototypes to the earliest Gupta coinage.[44]

Tandon asserts that this new king Chandragupta III, came to power during turbulent times and ruled after Kumāragupta I. The Mānakuwar Stone Image Inscription of Kumāragupta I is dated GE (Gupta Era) 129 (AD 448).[45] Many coins in lead and silver of Kumāragupta I are known, with dates GE 130–131 (AD 449–450).[46] By AD 449, Skandagupta had control of the mints in the western regions as the earliest-known coins of Skandagupta are dated GE 130 (AD 449). The Skandagupta's earliest inscription is dated of GE 136 (AD 455), from the Junāgaḍh inscription, which if Tandon's theory is correct, would imply that such a new king would have risen to power possibly in the central Uttar Pradesh region for a short 2–5 years, sometime between AD 450–455.[47] The Bhitarī Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta refers to a period of turmoil, when Gupta armies under his control were defending the Gupta Empire in the west, engaged in battles to subdue enemies who had risen up against the Gupta rule. During times of war, treasury resources were undoubtedly stretched due to constant battles and the continuing effort, which lasted decades. Recall that Tandon's earlier assertion was that Chandragupta I, did not issue any coinage (a major king confirmed via epigraphic evidence and is assumed by scholars to have ruled for approximately 23 years). Therefore, Tandon's assertion that a minor king (Chandragupta III) who ruled for just 2–5 years somehow managed to produce a substantial gold coinage is equally untenable. Now let us put Tandon's argument regarding the weights into context, beginning with a review of the weights for the Kuṣāṇa coins.

Even though these Kuṣāṇa gold coins appear consistent in weight over the course of the dynasty (avg. 7.72 g),[48] the gold percentage within these coins became debased over the course of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty. This gradual debasement took place over ca. 223 years, from Wima Kadphises (AD 113) to Kidara (AD 335).[49] The coins of Wima Kadphises contain an average gold percentage of 97.3%, while coins of Kidara contain 34.4% gold. By AD 319, when Chandragupta I came to power in central Uttar Pradesh, this region had already emerged as an important hub of arts and commerce. It was centered around the city of Mathurā, which the Kuṣāṇa kings used as their winter capital. Kuṣāṇa gold and copper coins were widely in circulation throughout this region during that time. Tandon's assertion that the pre-Gupta gold currency circulating in that region can be represented by only a single Shaka-style coin which circulated only in the greater Punjāb-Kāśmīr region (Fig. 6.6, D) is once again fatal to this argument.

44. Rezakhani 2017, p. 67. These last Kuṣāṇa rulers acted mainly as local authorities in the Taxila region. Also see Jongeward and Cribb 2015, pp. 174–78.

45. For inscriptions during the Gupta Era, see Table 5.1.

46. For dates seen on Gupta silver and lead coins, see Kumar 2017, pp. 123–24, table and Table 5.3 in this book.

47. During the ONS online meeting, June 2020, Tandon stated that in his view, Chandragupta III ruled for 8–9 years concurrently during the time of Skandagupta.

48. Kumar 2017, pp. 75–76.

49. Dates from Jongeward and Cribb 2015.

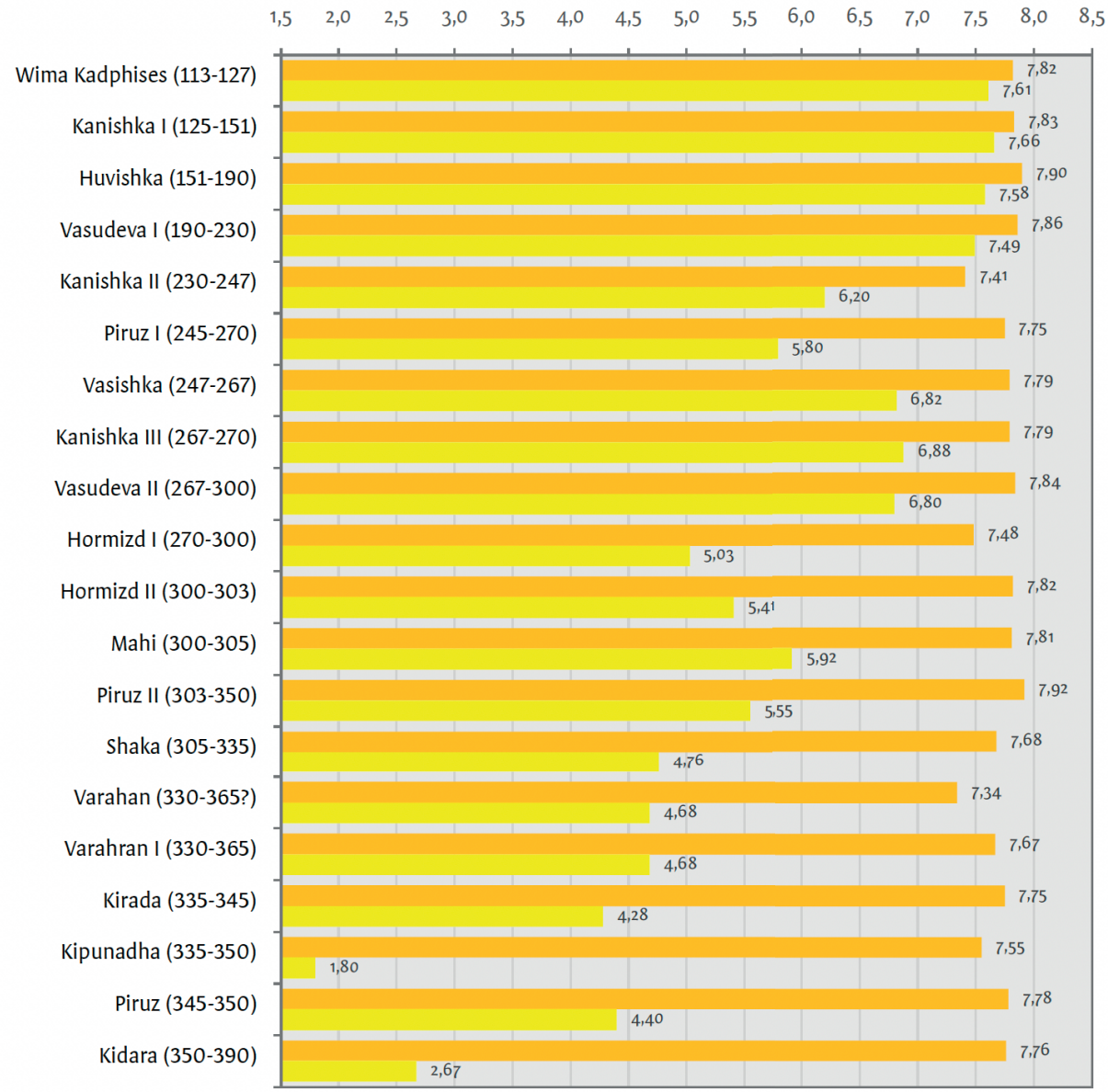


Figure 6.7. Gold coin weights (orange) and actual gold content (yellow) of Kuṣāṇa kings; weights (g) normalized for one dīnāra (dates AD). See: Kumar 2017, p. 75. This data was provided by Robert Bracey, British Museum, specific gravity study, and used widely in the first edition of this book. Dates per J. Cribb, former Keeper of Coins, British Museum.

In fact, even today in the central Uttar Pradesh region, we continue to find large numbers of gold and bronze coins struck by the earlier Kuṣāṇa kings—Wima Kadphises, Kanishka I, Huvishka, Vasudeva I, Kanishka II, Kanishka III, and Vasudeva II. However, Śaka coins are never found in this region. It seems that the ancient moneyers must have been aware of a gradual debasement of the later Kuṣāṇa coinage, hence rejecting those later-struck Kuṣāṇa coins for trade and commerce. It is apparent from the number of coins found in and around the Mathurā region that the higher-purity gold coinage was essential to support the thriving trade economy of the Kuṣāṇa Empire.

To further contextualize this discussion, Table 6.5 below shows the weight range for coins issued by different Gupta kings from the Dīnāra database of 6,824 coins (Table 6.2).[50] An extensive data set ensures greater accuracy, as a limited data set from a museum or private collection may lead to flawed

50. Kumar 2017, pp. 89–107. This database was jointly developed by Ellen Raven and me for our research.

results as the curatorial favor may have favored only well struck coins or may have come from a single hoard. Tandon uses a small "representative sampling" from a database of 1,609 coins to assess weights for the various groups of coins. Relatively speaking, this would yield less-reliable results.

Using the figures published in the first edition of my book that uses a larger and substantially more complete group (then 6,400+ in 2017; the data set now is over 7,300 coins), the weights are summarized below. The analysis shows that the average weights of gold coins continued to increase over 224 years of Gupta rule, while the gold content remained constant up to Vainyagupta.

Table 6.5. Gold coin weights for Gupta kings

Gupta King	Coin Type	Qty.	Avg. Wt. (g)	Min. Wt. (g)	Max. Wt. (g)
Chandragupta I	King and Queen on Couch	5	7.54	7.34	7.62
Chandragupta I	King and Queen	155	7.59	7.06	8.03
Chandragupta I	Rajadanda	13	7.66	7.34	8.03
Chandragupta I	Archer|Goddess Throne	130	7.72	7.34	7.98
Chandragupta I	King on Couch Group 1	19	7.65	7.44	7.81
Samudragupta I	All Coins	1,153	7.55	7.02	7.99
Chandragupta II	Archer|Goddess Lotus*	1,450	7.92	7.21	8.60
Chandragupta II	All Coins**	7.85	7.28	8.56	
Kumāragupta I	All Coins	1,706	8.09	7.34	8.59
Skandagupta	All Coins	296	8.87	7.11	9.50

* Excluding the Altar and Śrīvatsa coins.

** Data for all coin types excluding those listed under CG1 (Chandragupta I).

This table above shows us that the actual amount of gold in the dīnāras held steady throughout the reign of the imperial Guptas. However, contrary to the established view, the actual gold increased in coins struck by Skandagupta through the latter part of the dynasty, up to the reign of Vainyagupta. In fact, this stayed well within the gold content range as seen in the Kuṣāṇa dīnāras, which were also in circulation concurrently within these same Gupta territories (Kuṣāṇa dīnāras up to those struck by Vasudeva II; see Fig. 6.9).

The moneyers and goldsmiths of that time must have known that the Kuṣāṇa dīnāras and Gupta gold dīnāras had virtually similar amounts of gold. That is why the Gupta copper plates/land grants do not refer to dīnāras issued by a specific king when discussing the donations or purchase of land; rather, they simply state that a certain amount of land was purchased for a certain number of dīnāras.[51] Figure 6.9 illustrates the increase in gold up to Vainyagupta, before dropping more significantly for coins of Viṣṇugupta.

A closer look into the actual gold (in grams) for each of the coin types shows that the so-called "heavy weight" coins (8.0–8.4 g) with symbols/objects on the obverse as well as the belt design *all have a lower-than-average gold content*. The average gold in the Chandragupta II, Archer|Lotus coins is 6.49 g. The gold content in the Archer Lotus coins with obverse symbols seems to be debased: crescent (5.51 g), *chakra* (5.56 g), and the belt design (6.09 g). Based on the graph (Fig. 6.9), the gold content within the coins was rising during the reign of Kumāragupta I into the reign of Skandagupta (from 6.13–6.76 g); therefore, coins with a lower gold content could not have been

51. Griffiths 2018.

Figure 6.8. Weight range (g) for Gupta gold coins by coin type; triangle = average weight. Data from Shivlee & Dīnāra database.

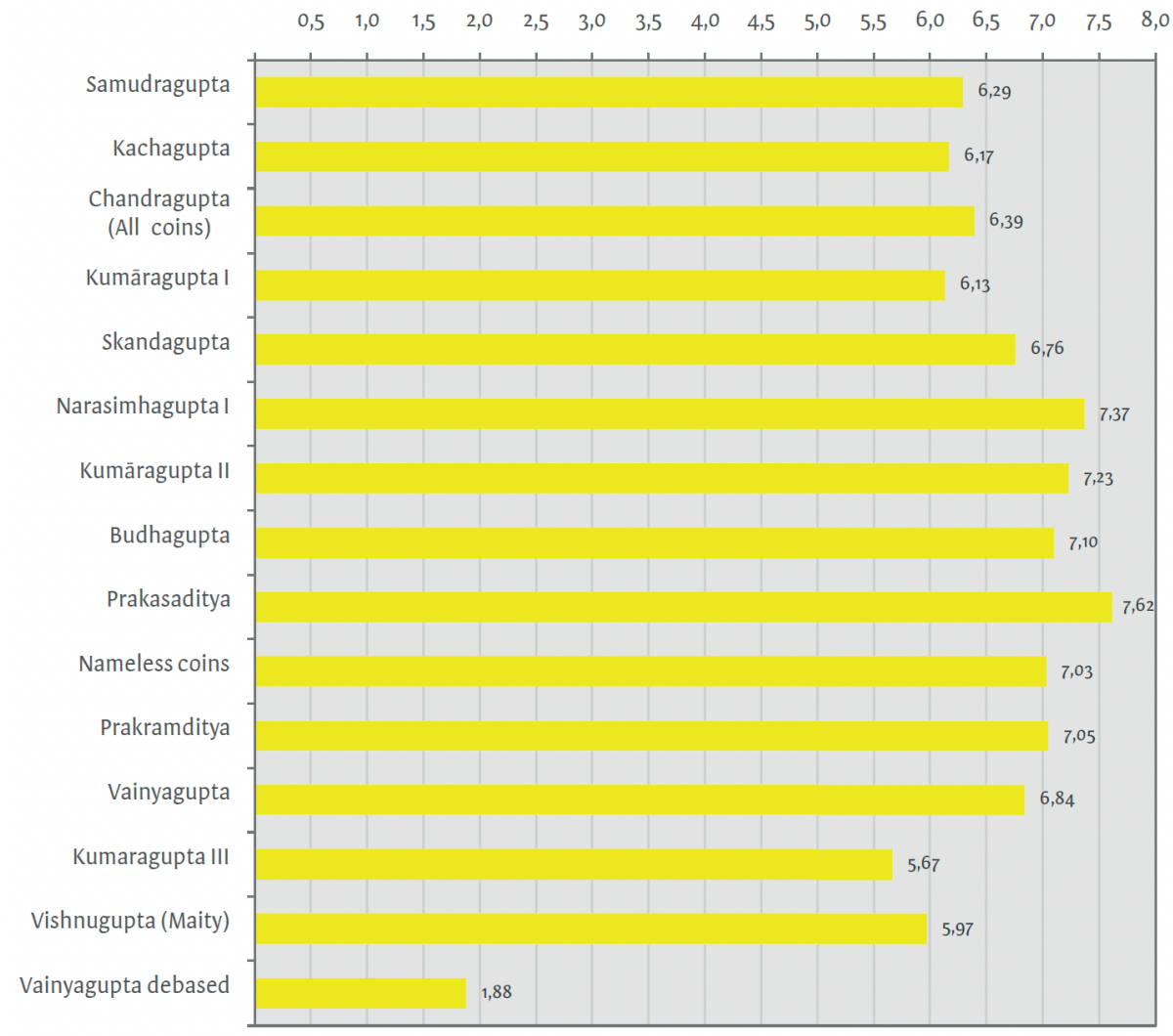


Figure 6.9. Actual gold contents (g) within Gupta gold coins by king.

minted after Kumāragupta I. So why were these debased coins struck with a lower gold content?

Numismatic evidence documents the date of start of the conquest over the Kṣatrapa Empire. We know of Gupta silver coins with the date of Śaka 320 (AD 398) as well as lead coins with a *Garuḍa* on the obverse with the three arched hills (symbol of the Western Kṣatrapas), with a date of GE 81 (AD 400),[52] confirming that parts of the Kṣatrapa Empire were by then under Chandragupta II's rule.

As a young prince, Kumāragupta I also took on this charge of fully defeating the Kṣatrapas, as we see on his silver coins issued within this same Gujarat region, with dates as early as GE 90 (AD 409). The period from AD 398 to 415 seems to be a time of turmoil for the Gupta kings. This was a long-drawn-out war, as the forces under Chandragupta II had not been able to fully subdue the Kṣatrapa kings. During this same seventeen-year period, we see the Kṣatrapa kings continue to issue coins in their own names. The last date seen on a Kṣatrapa silver coin was one issued by Mahākṣatrapa Rudrasiṁha III, dated SE 337 (Gupta era = Śaka era + 78 = AD 415),[53] which

52. Silver and lead coins were only issued by the Western Kṣatrapas and not part of the currency issued by Gupta mints. It is only after the Guptas conquered the western region that the mints started issuing lead and silver coins imitating these local issues, listing the Gupta king and dates.

53. Kumar 2017: 117–24, 279.

Table 6.6. Gold content (g) by Gupta king up to Budhagupta. XRF analysis data.

King	Coin Type	Avg. Wt. (g)+	Au Content (g)	Qty.*
Chandragupta I	King and Queen	7.59	6.85	4
Chandragupta I	King and Queen on Couch	7.54	6.39	2
Chandragupta I	Rajadanda (Scepter)	7.66	6.50	1
Chandragupta I or II	Archer|Goddess on Throne	7.72	6.47	5
Samudragupta I	Rajadanda	7.67	5.15**	2
Samudragupta I	Tiger	7.57	6.77	2
Samudragupta I	Archer	7.53	6.58	1
Samudragupta I	Lyrist	7.62	6.48	2
Samudragupta I	Aśvamedha	7.52	6.37	5
Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.56	6.31	24
Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe	7.53	6.07	6
Kāchagupta	King w/ Chakradhvaja	7.48	5.95	5
Kāchagupta	King w/ Garuḍadhvaja	7.77	6.66	1
Chandragupta II	**All Coins**	7.85	6.32	76
Chandragupta II	Archer|Goddess on Lotus	7.90	6.49	31
Chandragupta II	Archer Lotus/Crescent	8.33	5.51	1
Chandragupta II	Archer Lotus/Chakra	8.46	5.56	2
Chandragupta II	Archer Lotus-Belt/Sash/Sword	8.18	6.09	3
Chandragupta III	Archer Lotus/Śrīvatsa	9.10	6.52	1
Chandragupta IV	Archer Lotus/Altar	8.65	6.24	1
Chandragupta II	Chhatra***	7.78	6.41	8
Chandragupta II	Horseman	7.78	6.38	13
Kumāragupta I	All Coins	8.09	6.13	51
Skandagupta All Coins	All Coins	8.87	6.76	6
Narasiṁhagupta I	All Coins	9.44	7.37	3
Kumāragupta II	All Coins	9.21	7.23	2
Budhagupta	All Coins	9.33	7.10	1

+ (Kumar 2017, p. 121)

* This refers to the actual number of coins that were tested for XRF analysis and not the total number of coins of the type in the database.

** These coins were struck in the name of Samudragupta in the tribal regions of greater Punjāb, northwest frontier regions, and were not issued from the Gupta mints.

*** To further bolster his theory, Tandon assigned coins from the *Chhatra*-and-Horseman Type to this minor king who ruled for a short two-to-five years. I have included the values for these two coin types to show that the weights as well as the gold content are well within the range for coins of Chandragupta II.

finally completed the conquest of the Kṣatrapas, a feat achieved only during these early years of Kumāragupta I's reign.

The conquest of this strategically important western region provided continual and open access to the ports on the Arabian Sea for trade with Rome, and now for the first time, the Gupta Empire had control of the major trade routes across the central part of the Indian peninsula. The western routes connecting eastern Malwa, through Vidiśā connected the ancient port of Bharukachchha

and Suppāraka to Mathurā via Ujjain. The Mathurā-Agra route, following the upper Chambal Valley, proceeded to Ujjain and from there to the Narmada Valley.[54]

This war created a substantial strain on the Gupta treasury, and that is why we find a minor debasement of these "heavy weight" coins issued under Chandragupta II. The earliest coins issued for Chandragupta II at the start of his reign were of the 7.8 g weight with an approximate gold percentage of 80–84% (6.24–6.55 g gold content). With battles on the western front continuing the strain on the treasury, the coin weights in the second half of Chandragupta II's reign increased to the 8.0–8.4 g range, while the gold content seems to have been reduced to approximately 66% (5.5 g) to mask this debasement.

There is precedent for this kind of debasement, which is also seen on the Battle-Axe Type coins issued by his father, Samudragupta I. The obverse legend is *Kṛitāntaparaśur jayatyajita rājajetāʼjitaḥ* ("Victorious is the conqueror of unconquered Kings, himself invincible as a veritable battle-axe of the god of death"), which confirms that these coins were issued during this expansionist phase of Samudragupta I's reign.[55] The weight of these Battle-Axe Type coins increased up to 7.99 g, with a gold content of only 6.07 g, diverging substantially from the average weight of 7.55 g across all of Samudragupta I coinage, which had an average gold content of 6.29 g, or 83.28%.[56] It seems clear that Samudragupta I knew how difficult and expensive it would be to engage in a long, drawn-out battle with the Western Kṣatrapa kings, as his prior attempts to subdue them had not yet yielded control over that region. As such, he chose to eventually leave them alone. Once the Kṣatrapas were defeated and the major trade routes were firmly under Kumāragupta I's control, gold coin weights reverted to an 8.09 g average (and gold content back to normal range). It is apparent that the traders and moneyers would not have easily accepted debased coins even though some of these coins were heavier. This is the reason we see such an anomaly for the very small number of the heavy-weight coins found so far and they were mostly melted down or repurposed. **These symbols on the obverse were the mint's way to easily identify such debased coins.**

With the conquest of the Kṣatrapas complete, gold content in the coins rose from 6.12 g (8.09 g avg. weight, 75.74% avg. gold percentage) to 6.76 g under Skandagupta (8.87 g avg. weight, 76.19% avg. gold), which seems to have been more in line with expectations of traders and moneyers for the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta gold dīnāras, both of which continued to circulate in the region.

To affirm his attribution to Chandragupta III, Tandon further attempted to show a correlation between the *tamghā* seen on the reverse of the Chandragupta II coins.[57] The *tamghā* represents the guilds of craftsmen creating the dies at various mints. Based on the sheer number of different designs used on Gupta gold coins, it seems to be an accepted practice to copy and reuse a preferred coin design on multiple dies over time. An established design, either sanctioned by a mint master, a royal authority, or a die-cutters' guild, may be why we see so many dies of similar style with minute changes, in some cases created by the very same craftsmen using identical design elements across multiple coin types. Based on the vast range of obverse and reverse dies, the Gupta gold coin mintage must have been massive. Making dies using a sanctioned/approved master design for large-scale production seems to have been the norm, providing consistency across a vast and expanding empire via multiple mints. While a *tamghā* on Kuṣāṇa coins could be easily grouped by king, the mints do not seem to follow such a pattern under the Guptas. Rather, the same *tamghā* continued

54. For historical trade routes crisscrossing ancient India, see Kumar 2017, pp. 105–12.

55. Kumar 2017: 206.

56. Kumar 2017: 83.

57. *Tamghā* are geometric symbols/monograms found on the reverse of Gupta coins. These symbols do not seem to be specific to any specific Gupta king. It has also not been possible to conclusively link these symbols to individual die designs or die carvers/craftsmen, as the same symbols are used across reigns of multiple kings over hundreds of years.

Table 6.8, Weights (in g) of Archer Type coins with the name Chandra on obverse. All values for minimum, maximum, and average number of coins is from Tandon 2020, fig. 29: "weight of six varieties of Chandragupta III coins."

Chandra Archer|Lotus Variety	Qty.	Avg. Wt. (g)*	Min. Wt. (g)	Max. Wt. (g)	Au Content (g)**
All Coins	2,336***	7.85	7.21	8.40	6.39
Sun	6	7.98	7.87	8.22	-
Belted Group+	12	8.21	7.99	8.35	6.09
Crescent	14	8.28	7.88	8.41	5.51
Chakra	18	8.42++	7.83	8.61	5.56
Altar+++	11	8.65++++	8.56	8.70	6.24
Śrīvatsa	1	9.08	9.08	9.08	6.51

* See Tandon 2020, p. 21-23. This table has been updated with weights for the Belt variety and the gold content data from my metrology study cited above.
** Gold content data is from the xrf study published in my book, referenced above.
*** Kumar 2017, p. 79.
+ In addition to this group discussed by Tandon, there is one more subtype in heavy-weight coins – the coins where a bare-chested king is shown wearing a *dhotī*. This design subtype known to us from a solitary coin found in the greater Bengal region, pointing to a regional mint design. Coin number 1393, 8.37 g (Kumar 2017, p. 245).
++ Tandon lists eighteen coins of the *chakra* variety in this paper, with an average weight of 8.42 g (Tandon 2020, p. 183).
+++ Tandon 2013, p. 184.
++++ Data corrected per Dīnāra database. The reference to a 9.19 g Altar-symbol coin in the Indian Museum Kolkātā is incorrect.

to be used over successive kings, possibly pointing to a specific guild working at a specific mint or a localized production center (Appendix I, pp. 516–517).

Tandon's circular argument using the *tamghā* proposed another flawed argument: Since Chandragupta II coins with a Belt (Belt-group) are in the 8.0–8.4 g range, and since they may have either a diamond or a circle *tamghā*, then they must have been issued by a new king, meaning that any coins sporting either of these two *tamghā* and weighing 8.0–8.4 g must also belong to Chandragupta III. Note that Tandon does not state that this applies to all Chandragupta II coins struck to the 8.0–8.4 g range, nor does he explain the presence of other coins of Chandragupta II with the same *tamghā* that are in a lower weight range. Instead, he presented only the examples with a *tamghā* and weight combination that fit his hypothesis and omitted coins that do not.

In addition to circle and diamond *tamghā*, Tandon grouped coins based on the design of the king's hairstyle. He hypothesized that the shape of the *tamghā*, the curly "bunches of hair" (i.e., hair and head style of the king), the narrowing of his waist, and the hair bun on Lakṣmī's head emerged as an innovation for coins struck for Chandragupta III. However, each of these design elements were already in place as early as Samudragupta I, approximately a century prior to Tandon's assertion, seen readily on earlier Gupta coins.

The earliest version of a circle *tamghā* appears on King and Queen Type coins of Chandragupta I.[58] Coins of Samudragupta I, Variety A.9 (coin 10B below) show a *tamghā* very similar to the circle *tamghā* and design characteristics of the king (hair, waist, etc.) that all contradict Tandon's hypothesis. We also see a fully formed circle *tamghā* on the *Chhatra* Type coin issued by Chandragupta II (coin C below), with a weight of 7.78 g. The circle *tamghā* on a coin with a weight lower than the 8.0–8.4 g range further invalidates Tandon's theory, as it was issued prior to Kumāragupta I.

58. See coins **45**, **46**, **48**.

Tandon stated:[59]

> Given the close stylistic similarity between the Belted group and what we might call the Object group (for the object between the king's face and the Garuḍa banner), it seems clear that they form a close chronological sequence. But let's consider the possibility that the existing convention, that the Belted group coins were issued by Candragupta II and the Object group coins by Candragupta III, is true. If this were so, it would have to be the case that coins of substantially the same style and featuring the same *tamghās* were issued throughout the reign of Kumāragupta I, forming a bridge between the coins of the two Candraguptas.

Contrary to the statement above, the coins in Fig. 6.10 were struck by Samudragupta I and Chandragupta II, long before Kumāragupta I; Tandon did not consider these coins in his analysis.

Figure 6.10. Samudragupta I Javelin Type (10A–10B) and Chandragupta II *Chhatra* Type with circle *tamghā* (10C).

> A. Samudragupta I, Javelin Type, Class II, Variety A.9. The king is shown in *Tribhaṅga* style, with diamond *tamghā*; western Brāhmī script; 7.82 g.
>
> B. Samudragupta I, Javelin Type, Class II, Variety A.9. The king is shown with curly hair, narrowed waist, in *Tribhaṅga* style, with diamond *tamghā*; 8.0 g; circular *tamghā*.
>
> C. Chandragupta I, *Chhatra* Type, Class II, Variety C.1. The king is shown with curly hair, narrowed waist; circular *tamghā*.

When discussing coins which appear in his fig. 20, he stated that "the form of the *tamghā* is not quite fully formed, but they are close enough to serve as near predecessors of the Belted coins."

59. Tandon 2020: figs. 17–20.

Furthermore, he went on to say, "I believe I have shown that the coins of Kumāragupta could not have bridged a 30-plus year gap between the Belted and Object coins, but they very much could have served as precursors to them." They do not bridge a gap at all between Kumāragupta I and future kings, nor are they a precursor, as the coins above prove.

The coins in Fig. 6.10 struck by Samudragupta I and Chandragupta II are the bridge to the designs we see on the heavy weight coins, which were struck in the latter half of Chandragupta II's reign during his battles with the Kṣatrapas. Also, these same coins contradict Tandon's conclusion when he suggests that such design elements (curly hair, narrowing of the waist of king, Lakṣmī's bun, etc.)[60] were distinguishing features separating them from other coins attributed to Chandragupta II.[61] In fig. 21 of his paper, Tandon pointed to the topknot seen on the head of the king as proof. However, Kumāragupta I's Kartikeya coins, Class I,[62] show a topknot also seen on coins of Chandragupta II (which Tandon incorrectly suggested was an innovation and came into use *after* Kumāragupta I to strike coins for Chandragupta III).

There is another set of very important Gupta coins struck at the time when mints were switching over from one king to the next. During the transition from Chandragupta I to Samudragupta I, the mints used a new obverse die with the name of the new king, *Samudra*, but struck the coin (first coin below, 7.61 g) with a reverse die of Chandragupta I (whose imperial title was *Śrī Vikramaḥ*) instead of *Parākramaḥ*, which was the imperial title used by Samudragupta I. Similarly, when transitioning from Chandragupta II to Kumāragupta I coin production at the mint, a similar error was made when the mints used a Kumāragupta I obverse die with a Chandragupta II *Śrī Vikramaḥ* reverse die. It is also important to point out here that Kumāragupta I's hairstyle is shown with the very same heavy curls and bunched hair which Tandon claimed was a much later design innovation for Chandragupta III, further invalidating his attribution to a later new king. Moreover, the weight of this Kumāragupta I coin is 7.8 g and it measures 18 mm, fitting perfectly within the weight range of Chandragupta II coinage.

Figure 6.11. Transitional coins struck by mints when switching ovr production from one king to the next, using the wrong reverse dies. For a detailed discussion on views of different scholars and importance of such coins, see Kumar 2017, pp. 163, 186.

Finally, it is important to note that these "heavy weight" gold coins are mostly all found from the Ujjain/Vidiśā region. Vidiśā was at the hub of the trade routes from north to south and east to west, and also where most of the battles took place. Throughout Gupta history, the Gupta kings always posted either a son or a brother as governor of that important region, as they needed to control trade passing via these routes.[63] The Vidiśā/Ujjain region in Madhya Pradesh was also identified

60. See Kumar 2017, p. 241, coin 0228, UBS 82·43.

61. Ellen Raven disagrees with such a generalization. She maintains that mint idioms "work both ways—they can start and stop. Idioms do not prove chronology—just relative chronology." Pers. comm., 7 June 2020.

62. See coins **319**, **379**, **382**, **433**, **440**, **678**.

63. Rāmagupta and Ghatotkācagupta posted as governors in Vidiśā.

as the third mint that produced coins with very specific and identifiable design characteristics, one that Tandon has focused on while attempting to link all these heavy weight gold coins using certain *tamghās* to the new king.

Previously in this book's first edition, I had assigned the Archer|Lotus Type coins with the Belt, Sword, Sash, and Sun varieties to Chandragupta II. Considering current analysis presented herein, the Crescent and *chakra* varieties should also now be attributed back to Chandragupta II. The average weight and gold content for each of these varieties fall well within the range for Chandragupta II and fully supports this reattribution.

Toward the end of his analysis, Tandon presented a scatter diagram with incomplete data to make his final point.[64] In his 2013 paper, he had listed eighteen *chakra* coins, while in his 2020 paper, he showed just 14 *chakra* coins, including multiple coins with a weight in excess of 8.6 g (his scatter graph, fig. 22). Here, he had omitted the low weight coins from 2013 and added new higher weight coins, thereby skewing the scatter diagram, which seemed to show a sudden jump in weights. By correcting the data back to the eighteen known coins, the scatter diagram would show that Chandragupta II coin weights flow smoothly into the weights of Kumāragupta I coinage, thus confirming attribution to Chandragupta II.

In his conclusion, Tandon stated, "The most significant change is that the number of coins of Candragupta III now exceeds that of Skandagupta." This is an absurd statement without basis and totally contradictory to epigraphical and historical evidence proving that Skandagupta was a major Gupta king who maintained had control over the Gupta throne for approximately 19 years as is confirmed by his dated silver, and lead coinage, as well as numerous rock and pillar inscriptions and copper plates.[65] From AD 449 onwards, Skandagupta's efforts seemed to be focused on putting an end to any rebellion or revolts that arose to challenge his efforts to capture the Gupta throne. This is evidenced by just one silver and two gold coins found for Ghaṭotkachagupta and a solitary silver coin for Purugupta. It is only after Skandagupta's reign ends that we see the decline of the empire, and not prior. A minor king with such a short reign as proposed for Chandragupta III by Tandon, could not have produced so many gold coins, especially as these coins Tandon has proposed were struck at different mints, across multiple coin types and varieties, and across such a wide range of weights and gold content, while Skandagupta was actively stamping out any rebellion. Conversely, if such a new king (Chandragupta III) had come to power, either prior to or concurrent with Skandagupta, and had the resources to produce such a massive coinage as Tandon has proposed, it is inconceivable that he did not leave any epigraphical evidence, nor a single mention by the later Gupta kings in their genealogical seals, nor any mention of such a new powerful king in inscriptions by any of neighboring kings.

Barring new epigraphical evidence, a new king cannot be added to the Gupta genealogy between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. At most, this is speculation and should be considered as such. History shows us that such a minor king stood no chance of a successful *coup d'*ét*at*, as he never had control of military forces which were firmly under control of Skandagupta at that time.[66] Skandagupta's earliest date is recorded on lead coins as GE 130 (AD 449), which coincides perfectly with the last-known coins struck for his father, Kumāragupta I, in silver and lead with a date of GE 130 and 131. I studied a new hoard of Skandagupta silver coins, which has yielded

64. Tandon 2020: fig. 26.

65. Kumar 2017: 65, 122–23.

66. We know of this, as Skandagupta was in full control of the military during this period at end of the reign of Kumāragupta I and was busy fighting the Śaka and Nāga rebellions. This information comes from the Junāgaḍh Rock Inscriptions as well as the Kevala Narasiṃha Temple Inscriptions, which record the death of his uncle Ghatotkācagupta at the hands of Skandagupta's forces. Verse 6 of the Bhitarī Pillar inscription of Skandagupta references these events.

coins with a new last date of GE 149.[67] Such evidence confirms that Skandagupta was in control of the treasury and throne, while still putting down rebellion in various parts of the vast empire. He continued issuing coinage to the very end of his long reign. Tandon's flawed theories that such a minor king who had a very short reign and had sufficient resources to issue a massive gold coinage is totally untenable.

Another coin with a *Śrīvatsa* symbol and the king's name *Chandra* on the obverse, and the biruda *Śrī Vikramaḥ* on the reverse, is known from a solitary coin (Fig. 6.12, D). While the higher weight of 9.1 g may at first make it seem like an outlier, the gold content of this coin is 6.51 g, which does not vary from the range used by Gupta mints even to the end of Kumāragupta I's reign.[68]

Contrary to a narrative perpetuated through incomplete or subjective data (i.e., the color of some coins looked paler than other coins, etc.), the gold content in coins struck after Skandagupta eventually continued to increase under the later Gupta kings, as shown below. Rather than considering the coins with *Śrīvatsa* symbols, Tandon conveniently dismissed all coins after Skandagupta as issued by either Huns or Later Guptas. The study of Gupta numismatics cannot end at Skandagupta, however. In fact, the metrology of the coins after Skandagupta shows that the weights and gold content for the dīnāras continues to increase even under Budhagupta (Table 6.9).

Figure 6.12. Archer Type coins with *Chandra* and *Śrīvatsa* (B), altar symbols (A, C), Skandagupta with *Śrīvatsa* (D), Vikramādityaḥ (E), and Parākramadityaḥ (F).

67. Coin number **879**, GE 149 = AD 468. See the Skandagupta section, p. 447.

68. Kumāragupta I's Archer Type coin 1170, with a weight of 7.83 g, has a gold content of 6.79 g; Horseman Type coin 1448, with a weight of 7.84 g, has a gold content of 6.91 g.

Table 6.9. Archer Type coins after Skandagupta

Archer|Lotus	Qty.	Avg. Wt (g)*	Min. Wt. (g)	Max. Wt. (g)	Au Content (g)**
Skandagupta	296	8.87	7.11	9.50	6.76
Chandra Altar***	11	8.65+	8.56	8.72	6.24
Chandra Śrīvatsa	1	9.10	9.10	9.10	6.51
Budhagupta	10	9.33	9.21	9.45	7.10
Prakāśāditya	62	9.32	8.81	9.47	7.62
Vikramādityaḥ	49	9.33	8.99	9.53	7.02
Parākramadityaḥ	2	9.43	9.39	9.46	7.20

* See Tandon 2020, p. 21-23. The table has been updated with weights for the Belt variety and the gold content data from my metrology study cited above.

** Gold content data is from the XRF study published in my book. As this paper was being sent for publication, Tandon published a new paper in jons 250 (Winter 2022) where he presented XRF data based on a new study done by him on 167 Gupta coins. The results from his new study conform fully with my own XRF study published in my book in 2017. In conclusion, he reluctantly concludes that his study of the XRF data did not support the attribution of the King and Queen coins to Samudragupta, and the attribution of Chandragupta I coins with a throne reverse to Chandragupta II was also not fully supported. Regarding the Belted group, this conclusion of the low weight was correct as is discussed in this paper. Unfortunately, this study did not provide any new evidence to support his theories regarding a new king.

*** See Tandon 2013, p. 184.

+ Data corrected per Dīnāra database. The reference to a 9.19 g Altar-symbol coin in the Indian Museum is incorrect.

When discussing the Altar Type coins in his 2013 paper, Tandon lists eleven coins recorded with a weight range of 8.56–8.72 g.[69] Based on the weights and the XRF analysis, his conclusion can only be partially supported. When grouping both the *Chandra*-Altar and *Chandra-Śrīvatsa* varieties, Tandon proposed that the coins were being struck to four weight standards. Since the *Śrīvatsa* coin and Altar coins fit into the *suvarṇa* standard, he said the conclusion was "inescapable" that the coins belonged to Chandragupta III In his 2020 paper, Tandon did not include the *Śrīvatsa* coin and dismissed the Altar coins as a "Hun" issue, thus omitting data which did not support his hypothesis.

Toward the end of the fifth century AD, we see a new coin design emerge: the Horseman Lion-Slayer Type. These were struck by a king using the name Prakāśāditya, and the obverse legend seems to have been partially reconstructed by Tandon to include the name "*Toramāṇa*" within it. As such, these coins have been attributed to the Hun king Toramāṇa.[70]

Toramāṇa came to power around the end of the fifth century AD, after the reign of Budhagupta. Two coins above have also been referred to as "nameless" coins (Fig. 6.12 E, F). These were issued by kings using the birudas *Vikramādityaḥ* (the biruda used earlier by Chandragupta I and II) and *Parākramadityaḥ* (the biruda used earlier by Samudragupta I).[71] It is possible that both of these later kings were of Hunnic lineage, based on the unusual design style of the obverse, weights, and the higher gold content, and it also seems that by AD 500, such minor kings were ruling over different parts of the disintegrating Gupta Empire.

69. He lists one solitary Altar-symbol coin in the Indian Museum Kolkātā with a weight of 9.19 g, and while the museum does not confirm that such a coin with such a weight exists in their collection (based on their online catalogue), if such a coin does surface in the future, it would be well with the 9.19 g average weight range for coins struck during Skandagupta's reign.

70. Tandon 2015. Note, however, that the reading of Toramāṇa was reconstructed in the paper, and we need to see an additional specimen with clear legends to further support this reading and confirm the attribution.

71. See section 1.4 and tables of birudas/imperial titles used by Gupta kings (pp. 24–30)

Based on weight and gold content of the *Chandra*-Altar coin and *Chandra-Śrīvatsa* coins, the most that can be surmised is that these coins were possibly struck around the time of Budhagupta. Starting around AD 500, we see gold content within Gupta coins increase, coincidentally to the same range as the gold coins issued by the earliest Kuṣāṇa kings, most probably to re-establish legitimacy and acceptance. Based on the Altar and *Śrīvatsa* coin varieties, it is possible that there was at least one additional king who may have used the name Chandragupta (III), but he was not Purugupta, as suggested by Tandon. He did not appear immediately after Kumāragupta I but after Skandagupta.

Early in his paper, Tandon presented a foregone conclusion: "All the coins which some previous authors have assigned to Candragupta I should be assigned to either Samudragupta (the King and Queen Type) or Candragupta II (the Archer and related types with Goddess on Throne), and that is the practice adopted in this paper." Any analysis, statistical or otherwise, is only as good as the data set used. Using a "representative" sample of the data available will yield results relevant for that data set only. Such incomplete analysis should never be used for proposing a change to the genealogical sequence for such an important dynasty. It is also important to note that the use of average weights is helpful when looking at the weight of a specific die variety but not for an entire coin type, which may have been struck over twenty to thirty years. Context is important, and the entire known coinage should be reviewed, without eliminating data that could contradict a hypothesis. Scholars must also use all available data, not just the coins themselves, before reattributing an entire series of coinage. The use of coins with dates, inscriptions on copper plates, seals, and epigraphical records all must support such proposed conclusions.

While the discussion above centered around the five obverse symbols—sun, crescent, *chakra*, *Śrīvatsa*, Fire Altar, all coins with the name of Chandragupta—this discussion will not be complete without also noting that other obverse symbols are also present on coins issued by Kumāragupta I: Archer Type, Class I, Variety B.4 (p. 366). These coins have a uniquely different symbol: a flower in full bloom, added to the top left quadrant of the obverse. While the XRF analysis of these two specimens has not been done so far, it is my view that when these are analyzed, these also will be found to be slightly debased like the Chandragupta II coins with symbols on the obverse.

To summarize:

1. Symbols seen on the obverse of Gupta gold coins were placed by the mints to identify coins with a lower percentage of gold. This debasement was done to finance wars starting with Samudragupta I onwards. This debasement was limited to the wartime issues only, and most of these coins were eventually taken out of circulation. Hence, only very few such coins are found.

2. In the absence of such metal analysis data, scholars rushed to explain the presence of these symbols and speculated that these were issued by a new king who had taken on the name Chandragupta, and scholars called him Chandragupta III. Considering the current metal analysis data, such speculative theories should now be discarded.

3. There is no epigraphical evidence to support the existence of such a new major Gupta king between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta.

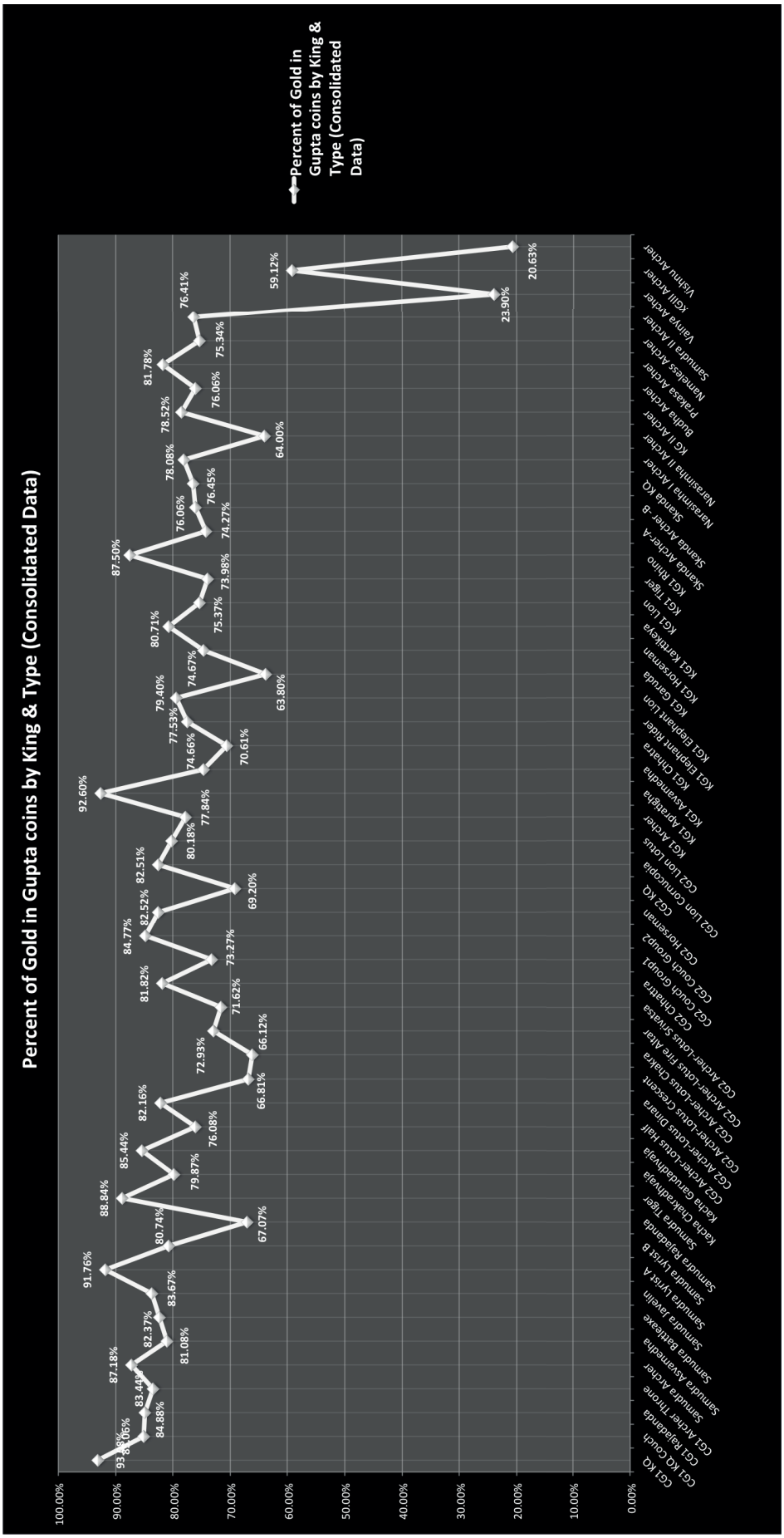


Chart 6.4. Gold purity of Gupta gold coins by king and coin types.

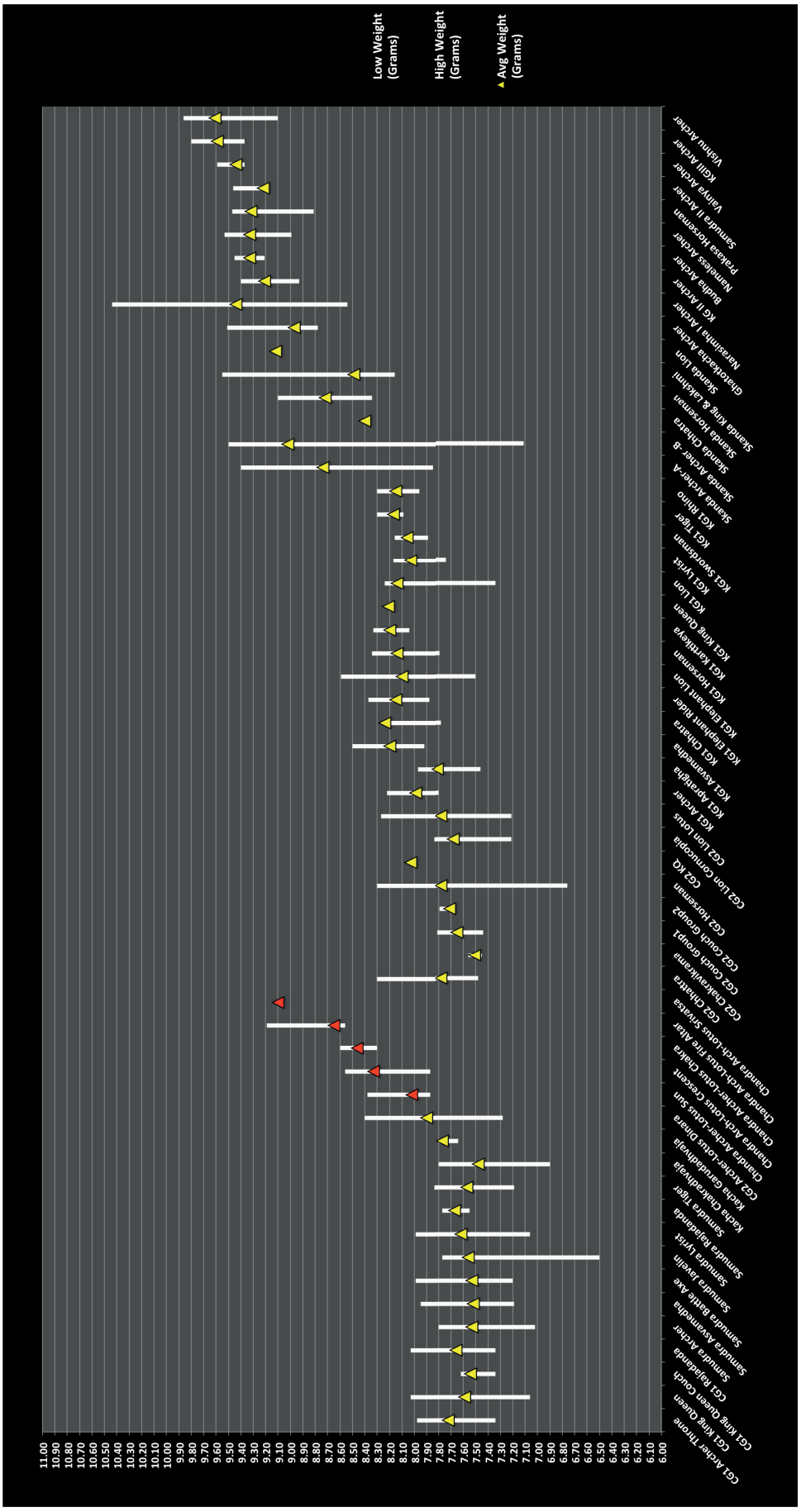


Chart 6.5. Weights of Gupta gold coins by king and coin types.

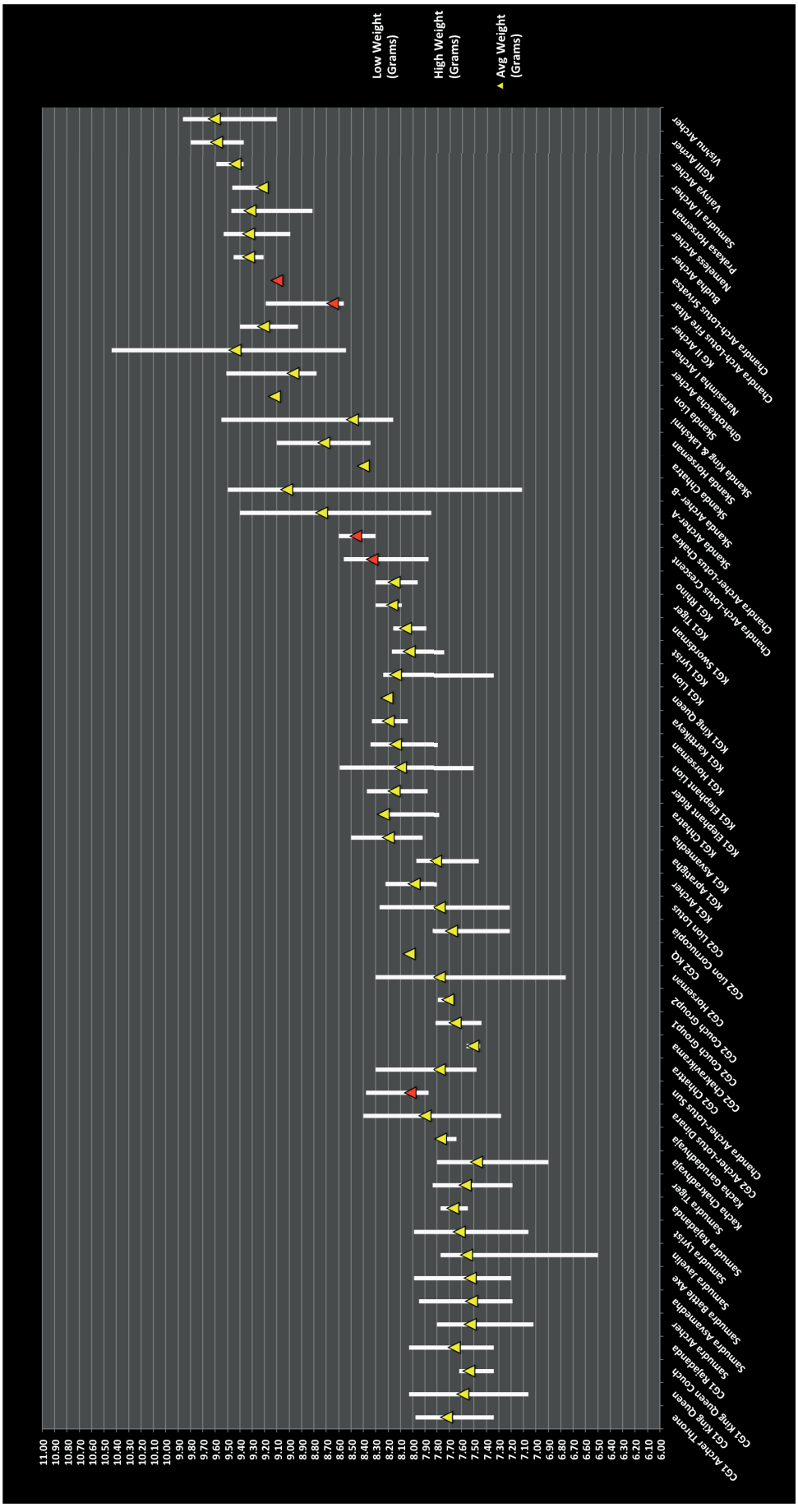


Chart 6.5 (cont'd)

Notes on the data in the Master Summary Table on the following pages

0: The specific gravity number is as listed by Mukherjee; however, the gold–silver alloy Oddy Table has been used to calculate the Gold%. The XRF analysis has shown that the average Cu percentage was 4.86% up to coins struck by Narasiṁhagupta. Starting with coins of Kumāragupta II, we see the percent of Cu start to increase. Because of the presence of Cu, in reality the gold percent number in this column should theoretically increase by an additional +3% gold. Since the Oddy table is only to one decimal point, the specific gravity reading on IM coins has been rounded up. See Oddy BM 1970.

IM/ASB: IM = Indian Museum Kolkātā. ASB = Asiatic Society Bengal. CCIM Fleet, 1906. Note: the coin numbers used by Fleet in this catalogue were specific to the king, i.e., the Coin 1 of Chandragupta II, was different than Coin 1 of Kumāragupta I. While the numbers were repeated, Mukherjee references the Fleet page number.

* Narasiṁhagupta: Mukherjee only lists one Fleet coin number. For coin 98, we do not have a correlating Maity number. In *JNSI* XXII (1960), Maity published the data for Narasiṁhagupta, Kumāragupta II, and Kumāragupta III, and Viṣṇugupta in the Indian Museum. The average from p. 268 is listed here.

^ As coins in this group have the Bāyāna Hoard Clasp, their weight has not been included in the average of weight but used in calculation of the size and gold percentage.

⊙**:** In this column, the numbers shown are XRF value. IF highlighted the number is the average of the Maity and IM numbers or if no Maity data was available, then only the IM data were listed here.

Average Weight: The average weight listed along with the number of coins refers to the coins from the XRF test Group that were analyzed using XRF. If the number of coins is blank, then the average weight is from database. For a truer average weight, refer to the table of average weights from the database.

Table 6.10. Gold analysis of Gupta dynasty coins

		Gupta Gold (Au) Coins XRF Analysis							
King	**Type**	**Qty.**	**Avg. Wt. (g)**	**Avg. Diam. (mm)**	**Au High**	**Au Low**	**Au**	**Ag**	**Cu**
Chandragupta I	Archer| Goddess on Throne	5	7.75	20.10	89.66%	79.71%	83.44%	11.78%	3.53%
	King and Queen	4	7.59	20.81	94.12%	92.02%	93.08%	4.74%	1.87%
	King and Queen on Couch	2	7.51	20.00	87.91%	82.20%	85.06%	11.49%	3.25%
	Rājadaṇḍa	1	7.89	19.00			84.88%	10.46%	4.31%
Samudragupta I	Archer	1	7.55	22.00			87.18%	9.90%	2.32%
	Aśvamedha	5	7.60	21.30	87.11%	75.63%	81.08%	14.02%	4.60%
	Battle-Axe	6	7.36	20.00	87.97%	78.02%	82.37%	12.23%	4.73%
	Javelin	24	7.55	20.70	88.66%	80.10%	83.67%	12.26%	3.47%
	Lyrist, Variety A (broad flan)	2	7.52	21.17	92.12%	91.36%	91.76%	5.99%	1.85%
	Lyrist, Variety B (small flan)	1	7.69	20.00			80.74%	13.88%	5.31%
	Rājadaṇḍa (Regional–Punjab issue)	2	7.57	20.61	78.83%	55.31%	67.07%	25.59%	6.23%
	Tiger-Slayer	2	7.58	20.70	89.05%	88.62%	88.84%	7.55%	3.08%
Kāchagupta	*Chakradhvaja*, Class I	5	7.45	20.00	83.22%	76.28%	79.87%	15.20%	4.59%
	Chakradhvaja, Class II with *Garuḍadhvaja*	1	7.79	18.00			85.44%	11.03%	3.16%
Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus, Half-dināra	1	3.30	15.00			76.08%	17.57%	5.95%
	Archer| Goddess on Lotus	33^	7.88	19.56	89.09%	75.16%	82.16%	12.50%	4.53%
	Archer|Lotus (Crescent symbol on obverse)	3	8.24	19.67	69.14%	62.59%	66.81%	25.60%	6.15%
	Archer|Lotus (*Chakra* symbol on obverse)	2	8.42	19.00	70.66%	61.59%	66.12%	24.67%	6.91%
	Archer|Lotus (Fire Altar symbol on obverse)	1	8.56	19.00			72.93%	22.00%	3.92%
	Archer|Lotus (*Śrīvatsa* symbol on obverse)	1	9.08	19.00			71.62%	21.83%	6.27%
	Chhatra	9	7.81	19.17	84.27%	79.66%	81.82%	12.85%	4.36%
	Couch, Group 1		7.68	20.50					
	Couch, Group 2	1	7.69	19.00			84.77%	11.45%	3.52%
	Horseman	13	7.73	19.38	90.16%	75.58%	82.52%	12.01%	4.22%
	King and Queen		8.03	21.10					
	Lion-Slayer (with cornucopia)	2	7.78	19.00	82.39%	82.64%	82.51%	12.34%	4.32%
	Lion-Slayer (with lotus)	13	7.80	19.73	87.00%	71.85%	80.18%	14.69%	4.80%

Maity Guha *JNSI* 20 and 22			Maity Guha *JNSI* 23	B. N. Mukherjee Indian Museum, Kolkatta (IM)			Consolidated Shivlee/BM/IM	
Fleet IM/ASB Coin No.	Specific Gravity	Avg. Au in IM Coins (Oddy)	Avg. Au in BM Coins	Individual Coin No.	Specific Gravity	Au % Using Ag Alloy (Oddy)	Au	Total Au (g)
				79	15.56	71.10%	83.44%	6.47
			91.90%				93.08%	7.06
							85.06%	6.39
							84.88%	6.70
26	17.61	88.30%	88.80%	77	17.86	89.00%	87.18%	6.58
2	16.49	79.40%	82.70%	75	16.16	76.70%	81.08%	6.16
29	16.52	79.40%	82.80%	78	16.22	76.70%	82.37%	6.06
			83.50%	73	16.20	76.70%	83.67%	6.32
4	17.80	89.70%	87.70%	74	17.00	83.50%	91.76%	6.90
							80.74%	6.21
							67.07%	5.08
			89.30%	76	17.08	84.30%	88.84%	6.73
2	16.25	77.60%	83.80%	72	15.89	73.90%	79.87%	5.95
							85.44%	6.66
							76.08%	
			84.60%	80	15.68	72.10%	82.16%	6.47
							66.81%	5.51
							66.12%	5.57
							72.93%	6.24
							71.62%	6.52
			87.12%				81.82%	6.39
1	15.54	70.10%	80.50%	81	15.36	69.20%	73.27%	5.63
							84.77%	6.52
40	15.90	73.90%	83.49%	82	16.99	83.50%	82.52%	6.38
				71	15.38	69.20%	69.20%	5.56
							82.51%	6.42
			87.6%	83	16.87	82.70%	80.18%	6.25

Table 6.10 (cont'd)

		Gupta Gold (Au) Coins XRF Analysis							
King	**Type**	**Qty.**	**Avg. Wt. (g)**	**Avg. Diam. (mm)**	**Au High**	**Au Low**	**Au**	**Ag**	**Cu**
Kumāragupta I	Archer	10	8.01	19.06	86.73%	65.83%	77.84%	16.30%	5.20%
	Apratigha		7.84	18.20					
	Aśvamedha	1	8.28	19.50			74.66%	18.00%	7.12%
	Chhatra	1	8.26	17.50			70.61%	22.18%	7.08%
	Elephant-Rider	1	8.24	19.00			77.53%	14.05%	8.21%
	Elephant-Rider| Lion-Slayer		8.10	19.10					
	Garuḍa (Regional–Kośala Issue)	15	1.28	20.93	84.28%	55.11%	63.80%	32.57%	2.87%
	Horseman	9	8.31	19.06	88.10%	67.32%	74.67%	18.84%	6.12%
	Kārttikeya	3	8.25	19.67	82.27%	79.84%	80.71%	12.48%	6.76%
	Lion-Slayer	7	8.18	19.86	82.95%	68.69%	75.37%	18.55%	5.46%
	Tiger-Slayer	4^	8.13	19.50	74.90%	71.87%	73.98%	19.39%	6.49%
	Rhinoceros-Slayer		8.14	19.00					
Skandagupta	Archer, Variety A (Skandagupta Reverse)		8.47	19.30					
	Archer, Variety B (*Kramāditya* Reverse)	4	9.08	20.90	79.10%	73.27%	76.06%	15.50%	8.19%
	King and Lakṣmī	2	8.52	19.50	77.55%	75.36%	76.45%	19.67%	3.79%
Narasiṁhagupta I	Archer	3	9.50	21.50	80.61%	75.75%	78.08%	15.93%	5.33%
Narasiṁhagupta II?	Archer		9.60	22.86					
Kumāragupta II	Archer	2	9.24	21.00	79.47%	77.58%	78.52%	13.43%	7.85%
Budhagupta	Archer	1	9.34	20.00			76.06%	15.69%	7.07%
Prakāśaditya	Horseman|Lion-Slayer	1	9.20	20.00			81.78%	12.90%	4.52%
Nameless coins	Archer (Vikramādityaḥ)	2	9.33	22.00	77.27%	73.40%	75.34%	15.17%	9.29%
Nameless coins	Archer (Prakramādityaḥ)	1	9.46	22.00			76.41%	14.06%	9.43%
Vainyagupta	Archer		9.44	21.00					
Kumāragupta Ill	Archer	2	9.56	19.75	66.37%	51.88%	59.12%	29.95%	10.49%
Viṣṇugupta	Archer	1	9.10	18.00			20.63%	71.66%	6.88%
Samacharadeva	Archer	1	9.55	21.00			61.84%	20.34%	17.38%
Samacharadeva	King on Couch (Rājalila)		9.68	20.90					
Śaśāṅka	Śiva on Bull	2	9.20	19.00	36.07%	26.78%	31.43%	33.80%	23.66%
Samatata (Śrī)	Archer with *Śrī*	1	5.74	20.00			68.88%	22.04%	7.77%
Balabhatta	Archer	1	5.45	22.00			54.79%	32.11%	12.82%
Balamriganka	Archer	1	7.27	21.00			96.92%	2.58%	0.17%

Maity Guha *JNSI* 20 and 22			Maity Guha *JNSI* 23	B. N. Mukherjee Indian Museum, Kolkātā (IM)			Consolidated Shivlee/BM/IM	
Fleet IM/ASB Coin No.	Specific Gravity	Avg. Au in IM Coins (Oddy)	Avg. Au in BM Coins	Individual Coin No.	Specific Gravity	Au % Using Ag Alloy (Oddy)	Au	Total Au (g)
			75.20%	85	15.46	70.10%	77.84%	6.23
				93	18.15	92.60%	92.60%	7.26
							74.66%	6.18
				-			70.61%	5.83
			95.65%	90	15.01	65.10%	77.53%	6.39
				91	16.47	79.40%	79.40%	6.43
							63.80%	
18	14.50	59.90%	71.47%	86	14.51	59.90%	74.67%	6.21
			82.91%	87	15.64	71.10%	80.71%	6.66
			78.52%	89	14.80	63.00%	75.37%	6.17
35	15.30	68.20%	79.00%	88	15.46	70.10%	73.98%	6.01
				92	17.48	87.50%	87.50%	7.12
			87.54%	94	14.56	61.00%	74.27%	6.29
1	16.10	75.80%	74.25%	95	18.77	96.70%	76.06%	6.91
				96	14.09	55.30%	76.45%	6.51
1, -	•	72.48%	72.48%	97,98	15.48, 13.51	70.1%, 47.7%	78.08%	7.42
	•	64.00%					64.00%	6.14
	•	70.50%	70.50%				78.52%	7.26
							76.06%	7.10
1			73.00%	101	15.43	69.20%	81.78%	7.52
	•	50.90%					75.34%	7.03
							76.41%	7.23
2			72.50%	100			72.50%	6.84
			50.90%	99	12.66		59.12%	5.65
	•	61.65%	61.65%				61.65%	5.61
				104	12.20		61.84%	5.91
				105	11.24	14.00%	14.00%	1.36
			67.00%	106	11.24	14.00%	31.43%	2.89
							68.88%	3.95
							54.79%	2.99
				107	18.73		96.92%	7.05

Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Dia. (mm)	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)
1077	13	Chandragupta I	Archer|Throne	7.78	20.0	89.66	7.95	1.66
1071		Chandragupta I	Archer|Throne	7.90	19.5	83.18	12.44	4.28
1079		Chandragupta I	Archer|Throne	7.65	20.0	82.73	13.14	3.91
1076		Chandragupta I	Archer|Throne	7.60	21.0	81.91	12.41	4.12
1445		Chandragupta I	Archer|Throne	7.82	20.0	79.71	12.94	3.66
1052		Chandragupta I	King and Queen	7.43	22.0	94.12	3.88	1.81
1054	61	Chandragupta I	King and Queen	7.40	22.0	93.26	4.10	1.59
1053	66	Chandragupta I	King and Queen	7.40	19.5	92.92	5.22	1.86
1055	46	Chandragupta I	King and Queen	7.20	24.0	92.02	5.74	2.24
1003	8	Chandragupta I	King and Queen on Couch	7.68	19.5	87.91	8.89	3.07
1002	5	Chandragupta I	King and Queen on Couch	7.33	20.5	82.20	14.10	3.43
1001	26	Chandragupta I	*Rājadaṇḍa*	7.89	19.0	84.88	10.46	4.31
1030	159	Samudragupta I	Archer	7.60	21.0	87.70	9.77	2.14
1033	163	Samudragupta I	Archer	7.55	22.0	87.18	9.90	2.32
1043	241	Samudragupta I	*Aśvamedha*	7.98	21.0	93.23	4.77	0.40
1449		Samudragupta I	*Aśvamedha*	7.72	20.0	87.11	10.17	2.41
1042	181	Samudragupta I	*Aśvamedha* with Bāyāna Hoard clasp		20.0	84.15	13.04	2.82
1039	177	Samudragupta I	*Aśvamedha*	7.63	22.5	82.64	12.29	4.41
1041	184	Samudragupta I	*Aśvamedha*	7.52	22.0	75.89	16.46	7.47
1040	175	Samudragupta I	*Aśvamedha*	7.51	22.0	75.63	18.17	5.90
1049	208	Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe	7.32	21.0	87.97	9.22	2.80
1046	202	Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe	7.30	20.5	83.60	12.08	4.14
1045	204	Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe	7.64	19.5	83.57	11.81	4.31
1047	193	Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe	7.35	19.0	81.78	12.90	4.52
1044	199	Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe	7.20	20.0	79.30	13.19	7.01
1048	191	Samudragupta I	Battle-Axe|Kri	7.41	20.0	78.02	14.17	5.57
1031	155	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.50	20.0	88.66	8.58	1.50
1293	80	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.50	21.0	86.43	10.36	2.84
1431		Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.50	21.0	86.36	10.99	1.48
1019	338	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.67	20.0	86.35	10.30	3.34
1428	97	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.41	20.0	85.41	11.20	3.33
1027		Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.43	20.0	85.36	10.72	3.05
1020		Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.56	22.0	84.48	11.28	3.93
1416	112	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.78	20.0	84.43	10.90	3.45
1360	82	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.72	21.0	84.06	13.32	1.52
1423	88	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.76	23.0	84.05	12.90	2.95
1015	133	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.45	22.0	83.82	12.78	3.00
1012	118	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.48	21.0	83.60	12.90	3.14
1004	132	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.85	21.0	83.60	12.40	3.49
1008	96	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.47	21.0	82.92	12.67	3.75

Table 6.11. XRF analysis of Gupta dynasty dināras

Table 6.11 (cont'd)

Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Dia. (mm)	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)
1458		Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.26	19.0	82.47	13.24	3.09
1018	135	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.43	18.0	81.68	13.14	4.65
1006	85	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.40	21.0	81.53	14.49	3.98
1014	117	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.60	20.0	81.50	13.40	3.65
1335	77	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.63	20.0	81.26	15.55	3.00
1034	166	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.40	21.0	81.06	11.77	6.81
1022		Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.69	20.0	80.87	12.67	5.63
1011	116	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.43	22.0	80.38	14.43	4.87
1005	94	Samudragupta I	Javelin	7.60	22.0	80.10	14.40	4.76
1035	218	Samudragupta I	Lyrist	7.50	21.5	92.12	5.98	1.60
1036		Samudragupta I	Lyrist Var. A Large Flan	7.38	22.0	91.39	5.99	2.09
1037	226	Samudragupta I	Lyrist Var. B Small Flan	7.69	20.0	80.74	13.88	5.31
1029	228	Samudragupta I	*Rājadaṇḍa*	7.74	20.0	78.83	19.13	1.27
1028	229	Samudragupta I	*Rājadaṇḍa*	7.60	19.0	55.31	32.05	11.18
1058	233	Samudragupta I	Tiger-Slayer	7.63	21.0	89.05	7.73	2.78
1057	235	Samudragupta I	Tiger-Slayer	7.61	21.0	88.62	7.38	3.38
1435		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	8.10	20.0	89.09	8.53	2.30
1111	346	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	8.03	21.0	87.93	9.12	2.82
1446		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.81	19.0	87.78	9.49	2.31
1436		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.81	19.5	87.77	9.70	2.24
1446		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.81	19.0	87.14	9.97	2.40
1110	288	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.60	22.0	85.67	10.58	3.10
1103	344	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.72	19.0	84.55	12.10	3.08
1107		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.80	18.0	84.18	12.32	3.41
1368	298	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.84	21.0	83.68	12.32	3.21
1075		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.76	20.0	83.34	10.90	2.68
1102	343	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.78	20.0	83.27	13.19	3.47
1100		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.86	19.0	83.20	12.28	4.24
1108	328	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.70	20.0	82.69	12.13	4.92
1117		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.80	18.0	82.60	9.06	7.90
1082	319	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	8.24	20.0	82.29	8.89	8.10
1115	323	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.66	20.0	82.22	12.61	4.48
1112	347	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	8.10	20.0	81.73	15.14	2.79
1104	302	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.90	19.0	81.50	11.53	2.29
1093	317	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.56	19.0	81.07	13.79	5.14
1070		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.78	20.0	80.53	13.70	5.45
1432		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.95	19.0	80.23	13.40	4.37
1084	299	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	8.10	19.0	80.15	14.10	4.42
1431		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.87	21.0	80.10	14.72	4.78
1101	341	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.80	18.0	79.59	14.12	5.02
1081	300	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.70	18.0	79.48	13.46	4.97
1433		Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.88	19.0	79.32	13.98	4.60
1092	339	Chandragupta II	Archer|Lotus	7.70	18.0	79.22	13.53	6.86

Table 6.11 (cont'd)

Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Dia. (mm)	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)
1087		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS	8.10	20.0	79.08	15.33	5.27
1098	356	CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS	8.20	19.0	79.07	15.89	4.56
1434		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS	8.18	21.0	77.89	13.69	8.22
1096		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS	8.00	21.0	77.28	13.37	7.55
1106	363	CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS Half-Dināra	3.30	15.0	76.08	17.57	5.95
1099	357	CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS	8.10	19.0	75.16	16.75	7.86
1083	290	CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER|LOTUS with Bāyāna Hoard Clasp		20.0	82.44	12.73	4.83
1094		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER *Chakra* on Obverse	8.37	18.0	70.66	23.04	2.73
1095		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER *Chakra* on Obverse	8.46	20.0	61.59	26.31	11.09
1088	359	CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER Crescent on Obverse	8.20	20.0	62.59	26.93	9.93
1089		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER Crescent on Obverse	8.14	21.0	68.70	23.83	5.30
1090		CHANDRAGUPTA II	ARCHER Crescent on Obverse	8.39	18.0	69.14	26.04	3.22
1113	924-1	CHANDRAGUPTA III	ARCHER *Śrīvatsa* on Obverse	9.10	19.0	71.62	21.83	6.27
1109	963	CHANDRAGUPTA IV	ARCHER Fire Altar on Obverse	8.56	19.0	72.93	22.00	3.92
1121	368	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.83	19.5	84.27	10.70	4.44
1120	375	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.63	18.5	82.89	11.53	4.34
1119	365	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.91	21.0	82.27	13.44	4.05
1124		CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.60	18.5	81.99	12.06	4.27
1133	395	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	8.10	21.0	81.97	11.86	4.03
1122	374	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.78	20.0	81.53	11.79	4.57
1130	390	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.85	18.0	81.23	13.87	4.57
1125		CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.72	20.0	80.62	14.55	4.84
1128	385	CHANDRAGUPTA II	*CHHATRA*	7.85	16.0	79.66	15.89	4.10
1150	278	CHANDRAGUPTA II	COUCH	7.69	19.0	84.77	11.45	3.52
1135	408	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.86	19.0	90.16	7.73	1.84
1145	432	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.68	20.0	87.98	9.35	2.28
1439		CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.70	19.0	84.71	11.74	3.07
1134/1438	405	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.86	20.0	83.90	9.09	3.10
1144	437	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.75	21.0	83.23	12.69	3.98
1141	419	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.60	19.0	82.68	12.24	4.42
1142		CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.40	19.0	82.58	9.81	3.42
1143	438	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.74	19.0	82.36	11.61	4.05
1146	439	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.72	20.0	82.18	12.40	5.33
1139	414	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.50	19.0	80.57	13.60	5.48
1136	422	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.75	19.0	80.14	14.11	4.54
1147	444	CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	7.71	19.0	76.75	13.00	8.11
1437		CHANDRAGUPTA II	HORSEMAN	8.23	19.0	75.58	18.78	5.22

Table 6.11 (cont'd)

Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Dia. (mm)	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)
1137		Chandragupta II	Horseman(Fake: silver core, gold-plated)	7.95	20.0	67.59	17.69	2.92
1164	497	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.83	20.0	87.00	9.71	2.91
1154	460	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.89	20.0	84.02	12.48	3.25
1158	483	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer/Cornucopia/ Goddess Throne	7.84	20.0	82.64	12.58	4.72
1313	453	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer/Cornucopia/ Goddess Throne	7.72	18.0	82.39	12.09	3.92
1165	451	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.92	20.0	82.26	13.70	3.87
1163	480	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.79	21.0	81.36	12.70	5.50
1151	487	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.88	19.0	81.25	13.33	5.15
1162	471	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.82	20.0	81.21	13.43	5.20
1155	461	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.71	19.0	81.13	13.80	4.60
1153	488	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.50	21.0	79.64	14.42	5.75
1160	467	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.70	18.5	77.98	16.69	4.88
1156	464	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	8.13	19.0	76.70	17.10	6.04
1161	472	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.61	19.0	74.10	23.61	1.76
1157	478	Chandragupta II	Lion-Slayer	7.86	20.0	71.85	19.99	7.89
1062	252	Kāchagupta	*Chakraḍhavja*	7.61	20.0	83.06	12.97	3.76
1063	249	Kāchagupta	*Chakraḍhavja*	7.50	20.0	78.24	16.47	5.17
1064	248	Kāchagupta	*Chakraḍhavja*	7.30	20.0	76.28	17.38	5.98
1065	255	Kāchagupta	*Chakraḍhavja*	7.34	20.0	83.22	12.54	3.56
1066	247	Kāchagupta	*Chakraḍhavja*	7.48	20.0	78.57	16.63	4.49
1067	256	Kāchagupta	*Chakraḍhavja* and *Garuḍadhvaja*	7.79	18.0	85.44	11.03	3.16
1170	591	Kumāragupta I	Archer	7.83	17.0	86.73	10.03	2.89
1167	569	Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.01	19.0	84.86	10.19	4.89
1178	602	Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.16	19.0	80.83	14.62	3.62
1169	580	Kumāragupta I	Archer	7.90	18.0	79.63	15.15	5.12
1177	594	Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.08	20.0	76.74	17.63	5.64
1174	599	Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.08	20.0	74.76	19.52	5.26
1175	597	Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.00	18.5	74.76	17.61	5.22
1447		Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.07	20.0	71.66	20.90	6.93
1176	598	Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.00	20.0	70.63	21.08	7.23
1440		Kumāragupta I	Archer	8.10	19.0	65.83	24.17	9.94
1190	612	Kumāragupta I	*Aśvamedha*	8.28	19.5	74.66	18.00	7.12
1189	619	Kumāragupta I	*Chhatra*	8.26	17.5	70.61	22.18	7.08
1199	627	Kumāragupta I	Elephant-Rider	8.24	19.0	77.53	14.05	8.21
1216	650	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.32	20.0	84.28	13.36	2.25
1459		Sarabhapuria	*Garuḍa*	1.28	17.0	75.81	22.21	0.99
1218	635	Sarabhapuria	*Garuḍa*	1.32	17.0	75.23	22.26	2.28
1209	644	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.29	20.5	69.90	28.66	1.07
1200	636	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.30	18.0	68.86	28.70	2.44
1212	646	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.23	22.0	64.53	32.41	2.30
1205	641	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.22	22.0	63.74	32.95	3.31

Table 6.11 (cont'd)

Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Dia. (mm)	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)
1203	640	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.34	20.0	63.66	32.06	2.76
1213	647	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.30	21.0	63.54	32.34	2.29
1211	634	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.23	22.0	63.49	33.52	2.99
1207	643	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.31	21.0	62.99	34.07	2.94
1215	649	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.33	21.0	60.73	33.09	4.89
1206	642	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.32	21.0	60.25	36.28	2.85
1210	645	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.22	23.5	60.21	36.71	2.80
1214	648	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.31	20.0	58.05	38.25	3.55
1202	639	Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.30	21.0	57.73	36.28	3.60
1204		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.24	21.0	55.11	39.82	2.93
1448		Kumāragupta I	Horseman	7.84	19.0	88.10	9.47	2.05
1185		Kumāragupta I	Horseman	8.09	19.0	77.73	16.82	4.61
1184		Kumāragupta I	Horseman	8.18	18.5	76.81	16.76	5.96
1179	657	Kumāragupta I	Horseman	8.17	19.0	67.88	22.01	9.84
1191	680	Kumāragupta I	Kartikeya	8.25	19.0	82.27	12.32	5.41
1193	681	Kumāragupta I	Kartikeya	8.29	20.0	80.01	14.54	5.36
1192	679	Kumāragupta I	Kartikeya	8.20	20.0	79.84	10.58	9.50
1181	666	Kumāragupta I	Horseman	10.20	21.0	77.95	17.23	4.65
1182	664	Kumāragupta I	Horseman	8.20	19.0	71.90	19.59	8.18
1186	670	Kumāragupta I	Horseman	8.18	18.0	74.45	17.67	7.66
1187	674	Kumāragupta I	Horseman	8.11	19.0	67.32	24.85	7.83
1188		Kumāragupta I	Horseman	7.79	19.0	69.85	25.15	4.35
1333	700	Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	8.18	19.0	82.95	12.72	3.24
1330	695	Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	8.10	20.0	79.07	16.13	4.29
1329	694	Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	7.99	20.0	77.81	17.30	4.67
1332		Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	8.21	19.0	75.22	18.92	5.45
1331		Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	8.50	21.0	73.61	19.24	7.00
1334	710	Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	8.16	22.0	70.21	23.95	5.66
1328	690	Kumāragupta I	Lion-Slayer	8.13	18.0	68.69	21.56	7.88
1198	736	Kumāragupta I	Tiger-Slayer	10.26	19.0	74.90	18.98	5.94
1258	733	Kumāragupta I	Tiger-Slayer with Bāyāna Hoard Clasp		20.0	74.59	19.51	5.80
1196	729	Kumāragupta I	Tiger-Slayer	8.13	19.0	74.55	18.95	6.44
1259	734	Kumāragupta I	Tiger-Slayer with Bāyāna Hoard Clasp		20.0	71.87	20.13	7.79
1223	837	Skandagupta	Archer	9.07	22.0	79.10	15.27	5.54
1222	843	Skandagupta	Archer	9.16	20.0	76.68	13.87	8.82
1221	836	Skandagupta	Archer	9.08	22.0	75.21	15.82	8.80
1441		Skandagupta	Archer	9.00	20.5	73.27	17.04	9.58
1227		Skandagupta	Archer (Fake: silver core, gold-plated)	6.40	20.0	0.00	93.76	6.24
	849	Skandagupta	*Chhatra*	8.24	20.0	67.02	24.29	8.70
1229	855	Skandagupta	King and Lakṣmī	8.46	19.0	77.55	18.82	3.64
1228	854	Skandagupta	King and Lakṣmī	8.58	20.0	75.36	20.52	3.94

Table 6.11 (cont'd)

Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Dia. (mm)	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)
1237	916	Narasiṁhagupta	Archer	9.55	21.0	80.61	14.97	4.02
1235	915	Narasiṁhagupta	Archer	9.40	21.0	77.88	16.63	5.17
1236	917	Narasiṁhagupta	Archer	9.54	22.5	75.75	16.18	6.81
1239	922	Kumaragupta II	Archer	9.38	21.0	79.47	13.47	7.06
1238	923	Kumaragupta II	Archer	9.10	21.0	77.58	13.39	8.64
1341	927	Budhagupta	Archer	9.34	20.0	76.06	15.69	7.07
1243	959	Vikramādityaḥ	Archer	9.38	22.0	77.27	15.78	6.63
1232	957	Vikramādityaḥ	Archer	9.28	22.0	73.40	14.55	11.95
1235	915	Prakasadityaḥ	Horseman| Lion-Slayer	9.20	20.0	81.78	12.90	4.52
1233	935	Parākrāmadityaḥ	Archer	9.46	22.0	76.41	14.06	9.43
1241	977	Kumaragupta III	Archer	9.48	20.0	66.37	25.38	8.00
1240	978	Kumaragupta III	Archer	9.63	19.5	51.88	34.52	12.97
1321	1055	Balabhata	Archer	5.45	22.0	54.79	32.11	12.82
1427	1058	Balamriganka	Archer	7.27	21.0	96.92	2.58	0.17
1442	1040	Post-Gupta	Archer	5.57	21.0	77.82	16.96	4.80
1252		Post-Gupta: Śrī	Samatata	5.74	20.0	68.68	22.04	7.77
1247	999	Samāchāradeva	Archer	9.55	21.0	61.84	20.34	17.38
1244	982	Vishnugupta	Archer	9.10	18.0	20.63	71.66	6.88
1245	1022	Jayanaga	Archer	9.07	24.5	28.64	54.66	16.06
1246	1021	Jayanaga	Archer	9.50	19.5	25.52	44.04	29.85
1255	1007	Śaśānka	Śiva on Bull	9.50	19.0	36.07	40.86	22.75
1256		Śaśānka	Śiva on Bull	8.89	19.0	26.78	26.75	24.57
1443		Vinayadityaḥ	King	6.97	22.0	28.37	61.71	9.34
1444		Vinayadityaḥ	King	7.15	22.0	24.95	57.04	17.25

6.4. Low Weight Coins

A substantial variation in weight is characteristic of Gupta gold coins. This wide range has been addressed by scholars as the so-called weight standard, i.e., the mints were adhering to a specific target weight while striking coins. That may be true, as we do see that specific coins of a variety or a type are only found in a very tight weight range; however, it is not fully clear as to why the weights varied so greatly. The table listing the weights by king and type from the database shows, for example, that in coin types that seemed to have been struck throughout the reign of a king and found in large numbers, such as those of the Samudragupta I Javelin Type, Chandragupta II Archer Type, Kumāragupta I Horseman Type, the weights vary substantially; however, the *actual* gold percentage within the coins of different weights seems to remain constant. It appears that the mints were more focused on the actual gold content allocated to each gold coin regardless of weight.

Figure 6.13. Samudragupta. Javelin Type. PC, 1363. 6.13 g, 22 mm.

Figure 6.14. Chandragupta II. Archer Type. PC, 1365. 6.50 g, 18 mm.

Figure 6.15. Kāchagupta. *Chakradhvaja* (*Chakra* Standard) Type. Ashmolean 023084. 6.98 g.

Figure 6.16. Kumāragupta I. Archer Type. PC, 0226. 6.95 g.

Low weights can be a function of the coin being worn or clipped over time as it goes through trade. Low weights can also be a result of cast fakes made with either a silver core with gold plating (these are in range of 4.5 g, coins **237**, **238**, **551**) or cast coins made with debased gold. This is not the case on the low weight coins being discussed here because these are all die struck coins struck at the Gupta mints. For each of these coins shown above, their weights are substantially different than the weight range for the coin type. For example, the weight range for the Javelin Type coins is 6.50–7.77 g, a difference of 1.27 g (16.3%). The Kāchagupta coins of the *Chakradhvaja* Type show a variation of 11.5% (6.90–7.80 g). The Archer|Lotus Type of Chandragupta II shows a 13.3% variation (7.28–8.40 g); Horseman Type, 18.6% (7.79–8.34 g), etc. In fact, we see such variations across all the coin types that were stuck over

a longer time frame in larger quantities. Even coins which were struck in small numbers such as the Kumāragupta I *Aśvamedha* Type, show a variation of 6.8% (7.92–8.50 g).

The excavations from Nālandā, Sunet yielded clay molds with impressions of the Gupta gold coins. It is clear that these were not official production centers, and these molds were being used to produce fake coins with lower gold percentages, i.e., melt the coins with a higher gold value to produce a large amount of coins with lower gold value. The mints did not cast gold coins; their gold coins were die-struck. However, in trade it is possible that the cast coins may have been mixed in with the die-struck coins for a quick profit.

6.5. XRF Metal Analysis of Silver Coins of Western Kṣatrapas

The Western Kṣatrapas controlled most of the western region of India from the first century AD onwards until they were uprooted finally by Kumāragupta I, who defeated Mahākṣatrapa Rudrasiṁha III in SE 337 (AD 415). For all purposes, that is considered as the end date for the Western Kṣatrapa rule. We know this because it is the last verified date found on the coins of Mahākṣatrapa Rudrasiṁha III. We also see this same last date listed on the silver coins issued by Kumāragupta I, also written in Śaka era (SE 337).[72] No coins of Mahākṣatrapa Rudrasiṁha III have been found with a later date, which confirms that by Śaka era 337 (AD 415), his reign came to an end. A few minor Kṣatrapa kings—Rājā Mahākṣatrapa Jīvyaka and Miradātta with the title *Raja*—are known after AD 415, identified on basis of a few rare coins.

Figure 6.17. Rudrasiṁha III. SE 337 (AD 415).

Figure 6.18. Kumāragupta I. SE 337 (AD 415).

The Kṣatrapas did not have a gold currency in this region; the reasoning for this remains unclear. It is possible that Kuṣāṇa gold was still in use in that region, but even Kuṣāṇa coins are sparsely found there. The currency issued by them was primarily in silver, but also in lead and copper, all of which are found in massive numbers. As Chandragupta II began his conquest of this region, and as these territories slowly came under Gupta control, the Gupta mints issued similar silver coinage modeled on the same designs as the Kṣatrapa currency that now needed to be replaced. The Gupta mints copied the Kṣatrapa coin designs to ensure that this new currency was familiar to the local population for ease of trade. The Gupta silver coins also feature a bust of the king facing to the right, on the obverse, and on some rare coins, we find the date written vertically behind the king's head. This date is sometimes written in Śaka era and on other coins written in Gupta era. These dates provide us valuable markers to document historical events.

72. Coins with dates of SE 329, 330, 331, and SE 337 are known. SE 337 is also the late date in Śaka era on Kumāragupta I silver coins. After this date, the next date for his coins starts with GE 100 (AD 419). The years after AD 415 must have been years of chaos and turmoil in the Gujarat region with various powers vying for control of the region once Rudrasiṁha III had been defeated by the Guptas. Kumāragupta I must have regained control of this region by AD 419, as resumed the silver coinage dated in Gupta era.

By studying the metal content of silver coins issued by different rulers, we can get an idea of the prevailing economic conditions at the time. A group of eighty-four silver coins covering the entire span of the Western Kṣatrapas was analyzed using XRF process. The coins were provided by Alex Fishman from his personal collection for this analysis.[73] For silver analysis, it is important to note that silver metal is more reactive than gold; hence, surface enrichment on silver coins can sometimes skew results. This is not a factor for gold coins.

The XRF analysis shows that the percentage of silver within most of their coinage stayed constant throughout the 337 years of rule. A slight debasement is seen over time for a few individual rulers when the silver content dropped to the mid-70s% range, the average silver content registers at 93.84%. Five coins were tested that, according to Fishman, are forgeries, and they show a lower silver metal content and have been labeled as such on the detail list. The coins issued by the earliest of the Kṣatrapa kings show a slightly higher silver content in the 97–98% range; however, at the end of the 337 years of rule, the silver content was in the low 90% range.[74] This serves as an excellent reference point when analyzing the silver content of the coins issued by the mints for the Gupta Kings: Chandragupta II followed by Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, each of them ruling this region concurrently. The Gupta kings were good administrators and in order to maintain a good and prosperous economy, they knew that a stable currency was a must. Such a stable currency is only possible if the traders and local population embrace it fully. That is why we see the Gupta coins always emulating the designs of the currency it was seeking to replace.

In the Vidiśā region of central India, we see a different version of this silver coinage—*Madhyadeśa* Type—emerge under Kumāragupta I, and this new design continues to be used for coins issued by Skandagupta, Purugupta, Ghaṭotkachagupta, and Budhagupta. This new design features a distinctively flattish style of the bust of king on obverse with a date in front of the face in Brāhmī numerals. On the reverse, instead of a *Garuḍa*, we see a peacock, the mount of Kārttikeya, along with a circular legend in Brāhmī.

It seemed to be a common practice for the Gupta kings to issue silver coins in their own names, concurrent to the reign of their father or the reigning king, who was still on the throne.

Silver coinage of each Gupta king is discussed ahead in the book by king.

6.6. XRF Metal Analysis of Silver Coins of the Gupta Dynasty

We do not have exact dates for the start of the war against the Śakas; however, many coins that are dated in both the Śaka era dates as well as coins with Gupta era dates have been found. From a review of these coins and dates, the siege to take over the Kṣatrapa territories was a long, drawn-out, and protracted event. This war seems to have started towards the end of fourth century AD, after Chandragupta II came to power[75] and lasted well into the reign of Mahākṣatrapa Rudrasiṁha III, who was finally vanquished by Kumāragupta I in SE 337

73. Personal discussions with Alex Fishman. Fishman and Ian Todd have a forthcoming book that will cover this topic as well as the Gupta dynasty silver coinage in detail. Fishman is an authority on the silver coinage. His book, *The Silver Coinage of the Western Satraps of India* (2013) is the most up-to-date reference for the Western Kṣatrapa silver coinage, and the reference numbers listed here are from this book.

74. The study published by Jha and Rajgor in 1994 showed that the silver content fell to approximately 78% for some coins issued by kings after Simhasena and Rudrasiṁha III.

75. Chandragupta II assassinated Rāmagupta (Kāchagupta) to take over the Gupta throne forcibly in AD 383. It is possible that the following decade was spent consolidating the power and ensuring that the vast Gupta empire was fully under his control. If Chandragupta II was not the chosen heir to the throne, it would not have been easy for the entrenched Gupta administration, which was undoubtedly loyal to Samudragupta I, and spread out across the vast empire, to have immediately handed over control to this new king.

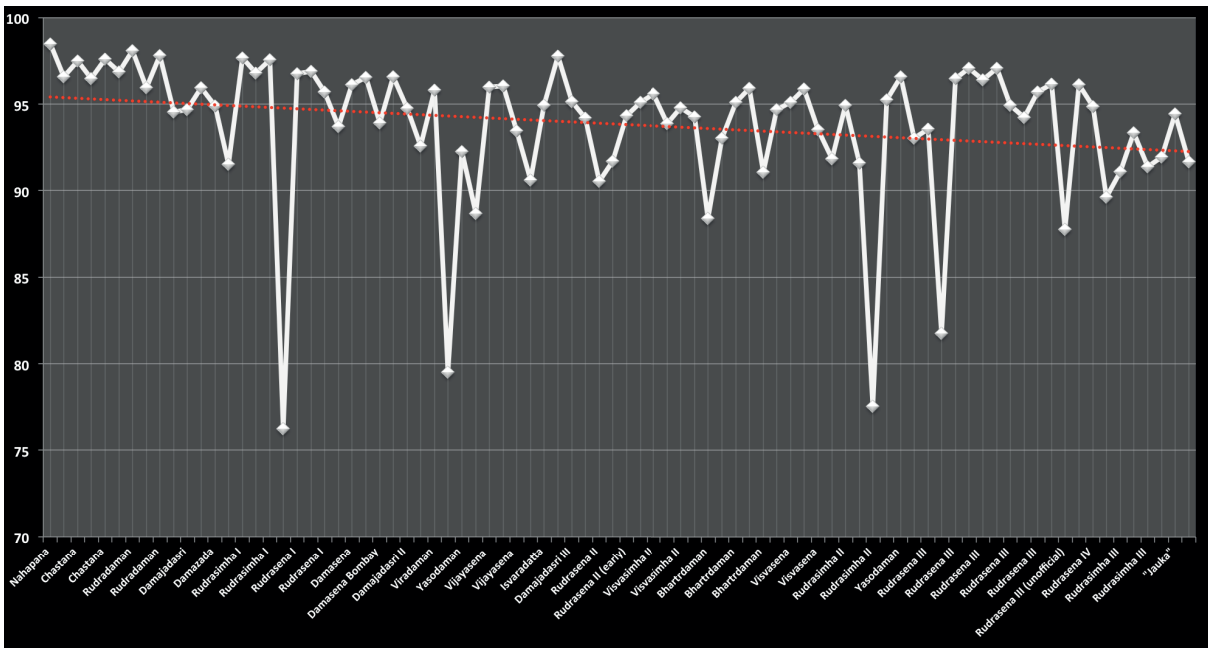


Chart 6.6. XRF values of Ag (silver) in coins organized in descending chronological order by Kṣatrapa king.

(GE 96, AD 415). The earliest date found on the Gupta silver coins is SE 320 (AD 398) on a coin issued by Chandragupta II.[76]

Prior to the start of the conquest of the western regions, the silver currency issued by the Kṣatrapas was quite stable and registers at a silver percentage within the low 90% range. Chandragupta II also followed such a high silver content for most of his silver coins issued in that region; however, it seems that in the initial years, when the siege was at its peak, the percentage of silver dropped into the 72.5% range (Coin **511**, dated SE 325, AD 403). The silver coin 3201, issued in SE 327 (AD 405), registered at a higher percentage of 88.56%, and subsequent coins continued with an increase to the high 80s and low 90% range. This shows that while the major siege was underway by Chandragupta II, the silver supply was affected and put a strain on the royal treasury, creating the need to reduce the silver in the coins slightly, to finance the war. Starting in AD 405 as the situation stabilized, the silver content of the coins started moving up to cater to the long-established local market standard. The market dictated that the silver content and purity remained very close to 90%, as was the case under the Kṣatrapas for over three centuries. This expectation was met, and the mints under Gupta control started producing silver coinage with similarly high silver content. However, during the rule of Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, we also see silver coins appear that register at a very low silver content. It is impossible to tell whether these were issued by mints under Gupta control as official debasement of the currency, or whether others issued these to profit by melting down the coins with higher content to produce many more coins with lower silver content. In each of the different types issued by the Gupta kings, only the Altar Type issued by Skandagupta registers at a very low silver percentage. The fact that each of these other types registers at a mid-to-low 90% range shows that officially, these coins were still being produced with stable silver content in the region by the official mints. It is important to note here that these coins are homogeneous alloys with a 48% silver average, i.e., these are not silver-plated as is seen on certain coins struck under Kumāragupta I in copper and still found with silver-plating residue on them.

76. See Table 5.3 of all Gupta coins with dates shown after the Brāhmī letters and numbers section.

Fishman Ref. #	Ruler	Au	Ag	Pb	Cu	Sn
3.3	Nahapana	0.673	98.472	0.263	0.592	< LOD
3.3	Nahapana	1.319	96.594	0.153	1.935	< LOD
4.lSR	Chastana	1.445	97.502	0.123	0.888	< LOD
4.4	Chastana	1.921	96.487	0.392	1.199	< LOD
4.7	Chastana	1.317	97.595	0.15	0.938	< LOD
6.1	Jayadaman	0.623	96.85	0.221	2.165	< LOD
7.2b	Rudradaman	0.751	98.086	0.047	1.117	< LOD
7.3b	Rudradaman	1.609	95.956	0.495	0.702	< LOD
7.3b	Rudradaman	0.807	97.804	0.157	1.232	< LOD
9.1	Damajadasri I	2.943	94.55	0.393	2.051	< LOD
9.1	Damajadasri	0.782	94.672	1.243	1.343	< LOD
9.2	Damajadasri I	1.781	95.942	0.245	2.033	< LOD
10.2	Damazada	0.693	94.889	0.877	2.561	< LOD
11.1	Rudrasiṁha I	1.051	91.537	0.172	0.481	< LOD
11.2	Rudrasiṁha I	0.879	97.658	0.38	1.083	< LOD
11.2	Rudrasiṁha	0.087	96.789	0.35	0.336	< LOD
11.5	Rudrasiṁha I	0.761	97.554	0.371	1.083	< LOD
13.2b	Rudrasena I	0.735	76.233	0.727	20.507	< LOD
13.4R	Rudrasena I	1.064	96.762	0.413	0.976	0.592
13.4	Rudrasena I	1.251	96.883	0.223	1.088	< LOD
13.4	Rudrasena I	0.947	95.695	0.989	2.369	< LOD
18.1	Damasena	1.214	93.701	0.505	2.31	2.034
18.2	Damasena	0.865	96.143	0.886	1.497	< LOD
18.2	Damasena	0.765	96.531	0.332	1.781	< LOD
18.4U	Damasena Bombay	1	93.903	0.603	4.299	< LOD
18.4U	Damasena Bombay	0.84	96.569	0.347	2.244	< LOD
20.1	Damajadasri II	0.858	94.744	0.519	3.65	< LOD
21.1	Viradaman	0.391	92.587	1.692	1.181	< LOD
21.1	Viradaman	0.572	95.81	0.902	2.716	< LOD
21.1	Viradaman	1.047	79.505	0.919	0.475	1.595
22.1	Yasodaman	0.528	92.255	2.672	4.493	< LOD
22.2	Yasodaman	0.463	88.691	2.161	8.685	< LOD
23.3	Vijayasena	0.16	95.972	1.345	2.523	< LOD
23.3	Vijayasena	0.429	96.062	0.6	2.372	< LOD

Table 6.12. XRF analysis of the Kṣatrapa silver coins, sorted chronologically by king

Table 6.12 (cont'd)

Fishman Ref. #	Ruler	Au	Ag	Pb	Cu	Sn
23.3	Vijayasena	0.255	93.456	1.761	3.835	< LOD
24.2	Isvaradatta	0.476	90.607	7.533	1.294	< LOD
24.2	Isvaradatta	1.784	94.919	1.178	2.119	< LOD
26.1	Damajadasri III	0.426	97.782	0.555	1.238	< LOD
26.1	Damajadasri III	0.346	95.15	1.281	2.987	< LOD
26.1	Damajadasri III	0.397	94.183	1.39	3.54	< LOD
27.1	Rudrasena II	0.532	90.527	1.852	7.025	< LOD
27.1	Rudrasena II	0.574	91.695	1.453	3.39	< LOD
27.1	Rudrasena II (early)	0.555	94.328	1.182	3.168	< LOD
28.1	Visvasiṁha II	0.558	95.107	1.761	2.498	< LOD
28.1	Visvasiṁha II	0.491	95.602	1.093	2.571	< LOD
28.2	Visvasiṁha II	0.527	93.864	0.881	3.682	< LOD
28.2	Visvasiṁha II	0.594	94.784	0.251	4.371	< LOD
29.1	Bhartrdaman	0.554	94.247	1.011	3.557	< LOD
29.1	Bhartrdaman	0.766	88.4	1.903	8.601	< LOD
29.2	Bhartrdaman	0.566	93.035	0.767	4.713	< LOD
29.2	Bhartrdaman	0.878	95.112	0.952	3.058	< LOD
29.2	Bhartrdaman	0.489	95.931	0.529	2.423	< LOD
29.4	Bhartrdaman	0.778	91.083	1.952	5.546	< LOD
29.4	Bhartrdaman	0.513	94.676	0.856	3.954	< LOD
30.1	Visvasena	0.702	95.109	0.68	3.509	< LOD
30.4	Visvasena	0.579	95.876	0.378	3.166	< LOD
30.4	Visvasena	0.578	93.544	0.561	5.064	< LOD
30.4	Visvasena	0.59	91.847	0.832	5.538	< LOD
31.1	Rudrasiṁha II	0.56	94.947	0.406	3.842	< LOD
31.1	Rudrasiṁha II	0.845	91.601	0.726	5.864	< LOD
31.1	Rudrasiṁha II	0.623	77.539	0.625	20.908	< LOD
31.2	Rudrasiṁha II	0.628	95.259	0.719	3.394	< LOD
32.1	Yasodaman	0.726	96.586	0.695	1.992	< LOD
32.1	Yasodaman	0.709	93.025	1.306	2.36	< LOD
34.1	Rudrasena III	0.833	93.56	0.654	3.82	< LOD
34.2	Rudrasena III	0.402	81.756	0.282	1.302	2.13
34.2	Rudrasena III	0.643	96.476	0.66	2.221	< LOD
34.2	Rudrasena III	0.807	97.081	0.4	1.712	< LOD

Table 6.12 (cont'd)

Fishman Ref. #	Ruler	Au	Ag	Pb	Cu	Sn
34.2	Rudrasena III	0.499	96.409	0.187	2.755	< LOD
34.3	Rudrasena III	0.592	97.057	0.177	1.589	< LOD
34.3	Rudrasena III	0.823	94.915	0.324	1.912	< LOD
34.3	Rudrasena III	0.803	94.213	0.157	4.569	< LOD
34.4	Rudrasena III	0.877	95.694	0.451	2.752	< LOD
34.4	Rudrasena III	0.641	96.172	0.335	2.682	< LOD
p. 275	Rudrasena III (unofficial)	0.562	87.778	2.996	4.8	2.097
35.2	Simhasena	0.459	96.138	0.275	3.128	< LOD
36.1	Rudrasena IV	1.222	94.866	0.722	3.19	< LOD
36.3	Rudrasena IV	0.76	89.639	0.428	7.85	0.596
38.2	Rudrasiṁha III	0.76	91.097	0.356	7.351	< LOD
38.2	Rudrasiṁha III	0.755	93.349	0.259	4.375	< LOD
38.2	Rudrasiṁha III, modern forgery	<LOD	4.889	0.139	64.223	< LOD
38.2	Rudrasiṁha III, modern forgery	<LOD	4.809	0.155	64.096	< LOD
38.2	Rudrasena I, modern forgery	<LOD	4.285	< LOD	64.564	0.525
38.2	Bhartṛdaman, modern forgery	<LOD	2.282	0.095	69.821	0.152
38.2	Rudrasena III, modern forgery	<LOD	3.991	0.141	65.082	< LOD
38.2	Rudrasiṁha III	1.014	91.395	0.182	3.377	< LOD
39.1	"Jauka"	0.733	91.95	0.762	4.756	< LOD
40.1	"Jauka"	0.641	94.446	0.273	2.921	< LOD
none	Maitrakas	0.698	91.662	0.535	7.106	< LOD

Percentage of gold (Au), silver (Ag), lead (Pb), copper (Cu), and tin (Sn) detected using the XRF analysis.
< LOD: Less than the limit of the detection for the instrument and software used for this analysis (< 0.1%).

For each of the types shown, the range of silver content is quite big. This shows that either because of the economic pressures on the treasury during the war with the Kṣatrapas (which lasted about 32 years), or as a result of spurious production of the coins, the silver currency under the Guptas was mostly in the 80–90% range, except for a few years when it dropped to lower levels. Coins with the following dates show a drop in silver content: AD 417 (83.7%), AD 420 (81.2%), AD 428 (78.6%), and AD 431 (82.8%). Other than these dates, the purity percentage of the silver stayed within the acceptable range of high 80s to low 90s. While no major calamities are recorded during these specific years in inscriptions, it is possible that there may have been years of conflict on the western front, a topic that needs to be explored further. Whether it was a planned event or an official act, we do not know. The Bhitarī pillar inscriptions and the Junāgaḍh Rock Inscriptions both clearly mention the troubles that beset the Gupta Empire during the end of Kumāragupta I's reign and the beginning of the reign of Skandagupta. The Indore copper

King	Avg. Wt. (g)	Ag% High	Ag% Low	Ag% Avg.
Rudrasena III		96.48	81.75	93.74
Simhasena		96.13	96.13	96.13
Rudrasena IV		94.86	89.64	94.86
Rudrasimha III		93.35	91.10	91.95
Chandragupta I, *Garuḍa* Type	2.04	94.58	72.50	87.93
Kumāragupta I, *Garuḍa* Type	2.08	93.79	59.09	84.07
Kumāragupta I, *Madhyadeśa* Type	1.89	94.79	47.12	77.87
Skandagupta, Altar Type	1.78	48.05	13.86	35.59
Skandagupta, Bull Type	1.76	92.61	51.30	81.07
Skandagupta, *Garuḍa* Type	2.14	92.98	75.92	84.45
Skandagupta, *Madhyadeśa* Type	2.12	94.54	94.54	94.54

* Variation in silver purity with average percentage of silver, arranged by king and type.

Table 6.13. Ag% in silver coins from Rudrasena III to Skandagupta*

plate inscription of Skandagupta from GE 148 (AD 467) mentions his victory over the invaders. These events are possibly from the time when some of the lower-percentage silver coins for Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta may have been produced.

Within the various types of Gupta silver coinage, the *Madhyadeśa* Type coins seem to be one of the rarest with the fewest known specimens, especially the coins of Purugupta, Ghaṭotkachagupta, and Budhagupta. The *Garuḍa* Type was struck in the largest numbers, and the Bull and Altar Type seems to have been struck for a very short time and are quite rare. In the Bull Type issued by Skandagupta, there is one unique variety with the bull facing a trident, of which less than four specimens are known. While I did not have Budhagupta silver coins to test for this XRF study, I did have the Skandagupta silver coins of the Bull and Trident Type, which registered at a silver content of 81.8%. The Bull Facing Right Type coins show a big variation in the silver purity, ranging from 92.98% to 51.3%. The debased coins may suggest that either they were issued during the initial phase of Skandagupta's war on the western front, which undoubtedly must have put pressure on the treasury, and as the political situation stabilized, the coins with higher silver content were struck as replacement for the debased coinage. Or it is possible that these debased coins were struck either at the tail end of Skandagupta's reign or even after his death, similar to the Altar and the *Madhyadeśa* Type silver coins which also show a substantial range in purity, leading to eventual debasement of all the silver coins.

The silver percentage within the Gupta silver coins with dates is graphed above. The coins included in this subgroup are from the Shivlee Collection and these coins show a date on the obverse behind the king's head. Fishman has read and confirmed all the dates listed, as these coins were originally part of the Fishman Collection. Alex Fishman, of course, as all in the numismatic field are aware, is one of the foremost experts in the silver and base metal coinage of ancient India. He had collected these coins over the course of more than forty years, and this is the only group of Gupta silver coins with dates in one collection. Dates on Gupta silver coins are very rarely found. Less than 1% of silver coins will show traces of a date, and maybe less than half of these are clear enough to be read.

Most of the remaining silver coins illustrated in this volume were originally from the personal collection of William Spengler, now part of the Shivlee Collection. Spengler was one of the foremost researchers and collectors of Indian coins, and in addition to Kuṣāṇa coins, one of his passions was the base metal coinage of the Guptas. He built his collection of ancient Indian coins in the 1960s and was a gifted scholar in numismatics. I met him in the late '80s and always enjoyed talking to him about the Gupta coins. At that time, he was one of the very few people in the US that could understand and hold a conversation on Gupta coinage. I am fortunate to have purchased his entire collection of Gupta dynasty gold, silver, copper and lead coins, which came very handy for this study and the research for this book. These silver coins also have a legacy: they survived almost 1,600 years and now provide us with valuable data for continuing discussions and debates on the rich history of the Gupta dynasty.

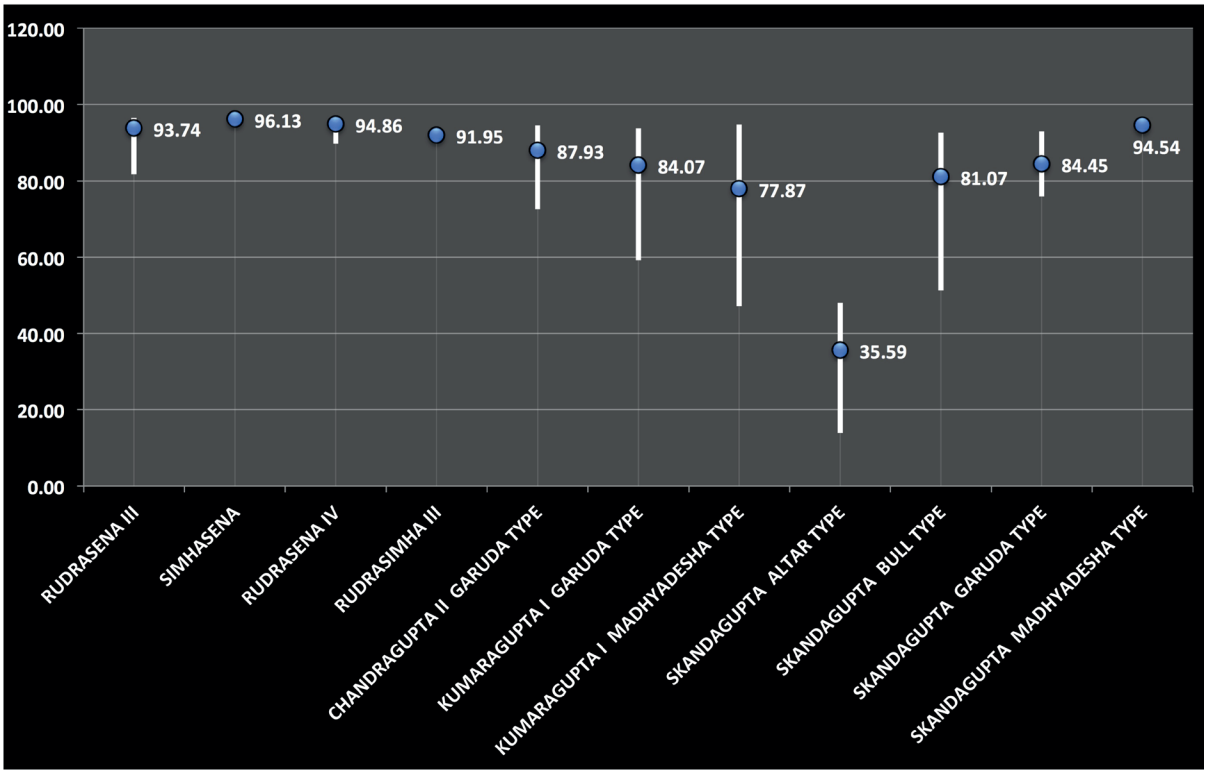


Chart 6.7. Percentage of silver in coins of Western Kṣatrapas vs. Gupta Dynasty.

Date (AD)	Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Diam. (mm)	Au%	Ag%	Cu%
403	3200	511	CHANDRAGUPTA II	325 SE (AD 403) *GARUḌA*	2.07	14.0	0.60	72.50	26.21
405	3201	512	CHANDRAGUPTA II	327 SE (AD 405) *GARUḌA*	2.03	16 × 14	0.73	86.56	12.36
409	3210	739	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	90 GE (AD 409) *GARUḌA*	2.08	13.0	0.75	91.05	7.98
412	3202		CHANDRAGUPTA II	93 GE (AD 412) *GARUḌA*	2.07	13.0	0.75	91.22	7.59
406	3276	515	CHANDRAGUPTA II	87 GE (AD 406) Gupta Kula legend	1.94	14.0	0.65	88.44	10.43
409	3214	740	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	90+ GE (AD 409) *GARUḌA*	1.82	14.0	0.82	88.16	10.78
413	3211	741	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	94 GE (AD 413) *GARUḌA*	2.08	14.0	0.64	87.61	11.51
414	3209	743	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	337 SE (AD 414) *GARUḌA*	1.86	14.0	0.71	89.98	9.08
414	3212		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	95 GE (AD 414) *GARUḌA*	2.23	13.0	0.83	91.64	7.18
416	3215	744	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	97 GE (AD 416) *GARUḌA*	2.16	13.0	0.60	83.73	15.33
416	3216	745	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	97 GE (AD 416) *GARUḌA*	2.13	13.0	0.73	89.57	9.34
418	3217		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	99 GE (AD 418) *GARUḌA*	2.13	14.0	0.86	91.15	7.56
419	3218		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	100 GE (AD 419) *GARUḌA*	2.13	15.0	0.81	89.70	8.34
419	3219		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	100 GE (AD 419) *GARUḌA*	2.17	14.0	0.62	81.27	17.85
421	3220	749	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	102 GE (AD 421) *GARUḌA*	2.17	13.0	0.72	87.14	11.41
422	3221		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	103 GE (AD 422) *GARUḌA*	1.97	14.0	0.79	93.92	4.85
422	3222		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	103 GE (AD 422) *GARUḌA*	2.09	14.0	0.73	87.27	11.70
424	3223		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	105 GE (AD 424) *GARUḌA*	2.22	16.0	0.81	89.49	9.53
424	3224	752	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	105 GE (AD 424) *GARUḌA*	2.11	15.0	0.76	90.14	8.89

Table 6.14. XRF analysis of the Gupta dynasty silver coins

Table 6.14 (cont'd)

Date (AD)	Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Diam. (mm)	Au%	Ag%	Cu%
425	3225	753	Kumāragupta I	106 GE (AD 425) *Garuḍa*	2.18	14.0	0.74	92.92	6.07
428	3278	755	Kumāragupta I	108 GE (AD 428) *Garuḍa*	2.19	15.0	0.56	78.64	20.31
433	3231	763	Kumāragupta I	114 GE (AD 433) *Garuḍa*	2.17	14.0	0.71	93.26	5.70
426	3226	754	Kumāragupta I	107 GE (AD 426) *Garuḍa*	2.17	14.0	0.88	91.30	7.53
430	3228	760	Kumāragupta I	111 GE (AD 430) *Garuḍa*	2.06	14.0	0.66	82.78	16.40
419	3227	756	Kumāragupta I	100 GE (AD 419) *Garuḍa*	2.17	14.0	0.92	92.00	6.82
419	3229		Kumāragupta I	110 GE (AD 419) *Garuḍa*	2.28	14.0	0.73	88.03	11.04
433	3230	762	Kumāragupta I	114 GE (AD 433) *Garuḍa*	2.18	14.0	0.86	92.67	6.40
435	3232	765	Kumāragupta I	116 GE (AD 435) *Garuḍa*	2.16	14.0	0.78	92.02	7.04
	3234		Kumāragupta I	Date off-flan *Garuḍa*	2.11	15.0	0.99	87.85	10.65
	3233		Kumāragupta I	Date off-flan *Garuḍa*	2.13	14.0	0.76	91.04	7.59
	3237		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	2.12	13.0	0.65	90.31	8.75
	3238		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	2.18	15.0	0.76	88.43	10.50
	3236		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa* Obv. die of CGII	2.06	15.0	0.63	90.58	7.75
	3279		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa* Silver-plated on copper core	1.89	12.0	< LOD	<LOD	**99.17**
	3239		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	2.15	14.0	0.51	90.51	8.82
	3240		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	2.08	14.0	0.73	88.12	9.49
	3241		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.93	13.0	0.75	91.96	5.79
	3242		Kumāragupta I	*Garuḍa*	1.81	10.0	0.22	25.55	71.61

Table 6.14 (cont'd)

Date (AD)	Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Diam. (mm)	Au%	Ag%	Cu%
	3245		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	1.88	14.0	0.51	65.55	33.44
	3253		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	2.12	11.0	0.32	36.61	60.00
	3259		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	1.90	15.0	0.75	93.79	5.04
	3260		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	2.02	14.0	0.50	83.97	14.95
	3261		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	2.09	12.0	0.71	81.14	16.65
	3263		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	1.92	14.0	0.52	63.91	34.49
	3268		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA*	2.02	13.0	0.65	77.64	18.65
	3208		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA* Paka Gupta legend	2.14	14.0	0.85	89.29	9.51
	3235		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*GARUḌA* Overstruck on RUDRASENA II	1.99	13.0	0.49	59.09	31.53
	3254	776	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*MADHYADEŚA* PEACOCK	1.90	14.0	0.64	77.22	21.14
	3256	774	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*MADHYADEŚA* PEACOCK	2.00	15.0	0.63	84.79	14.22
	3257	777	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*MADHYADEŚA* PEACOCK	1.85	15.0	1.26	94.79	2.65
	3244	880	SKANDAGUPTA	*MADHYADEŚA* PEACOCK	2.02	16.0	0.59	85.42	12.40
	3243		KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*MADHYADEŚA* PEACOCK	1.97	15.0	0.53	47.12	50.44
	3255	775	KUMĀRAGUPTA I	*MADHYADEŚA* PEACOCK	1.61	15.0	0.47	47.69	50.58
	3249		SKANDAGUPTA	ALTAR	1.50	12.0	0.22	13.86	83.43
	3265		SKANDAGUPTA	ALTAR	1.42	13.0	0.12	23.10	75.21
	3266		SKANDAGUPTA	ALTAR	1.95	12.0	0.40	45.93	52.85

Table 6.14 (cont'd)

Date (AD)	Collection No.	Coin No.	King	Type	Wt. (g)	Diam. (mm)	Au%	Ag%	Cu%
	3267		Skandagupta	Altar	2.22	12.0	0.41	47.04	51.56
	3248		Skandagupta	Altar *Triśūla*	1.79	11.0	0.40	48.05	49.15
	3280	886	Skandagupta	Bull to L. Facing *Triśūla* Trident	1.93	15.0	0.65	81.80	17.32
	3247		Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.73	12.0	0.69	67.40	30.57
	3269	882	Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.72	13.0	0.68	79.54	18.67
	3270		Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.66	13.0	0.42	51.30	47.62
	3271		Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.81	15.0	0.63	81.52	17.30
	3272		Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.80	14.0	0.59	67.79	29.82
	3273	881	Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.83	13.0	1.03	87.83	9.79
	3274		Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.65	13.0	0.71	90.07	8.80
	3275	884	Skandagupta	Bull to R.	1.75	12.0	0.63	92.61	6.18
	3246		Skandagupta	*Garuḍa*	2.07	14.0	0.72	92.98	5.22
	3264	863	Skandagupta	*Garuḍa*	2.20	14.0	0.79	75.92	22.15
	3250		Skandagupta	*Madhyadeśa* Peacock	2.12	16.0	1.30	94.54	3.39

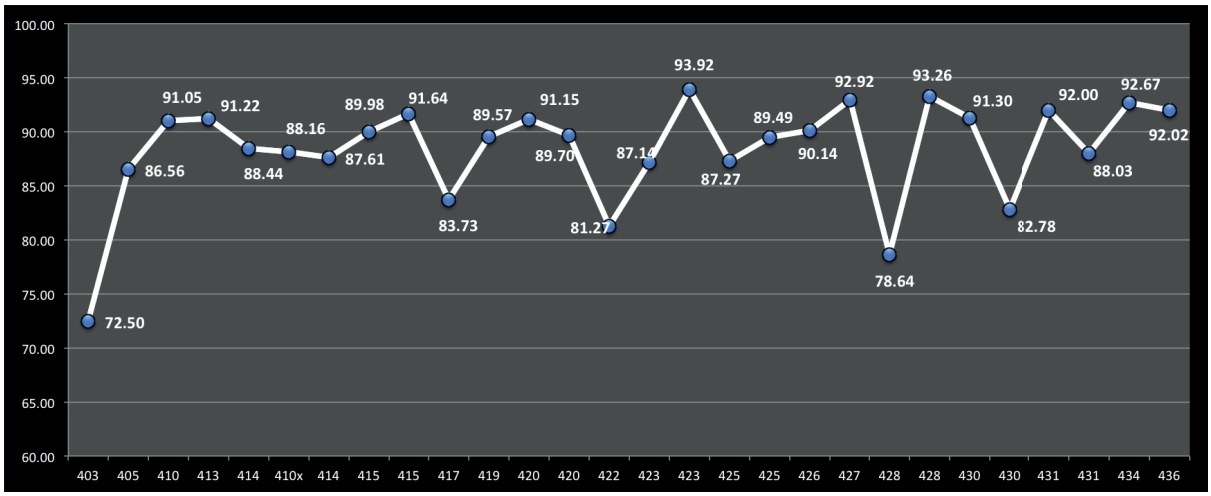


Chart 6.8. Silver purity in the silver coins showing the dates struck by the Gupta kings.

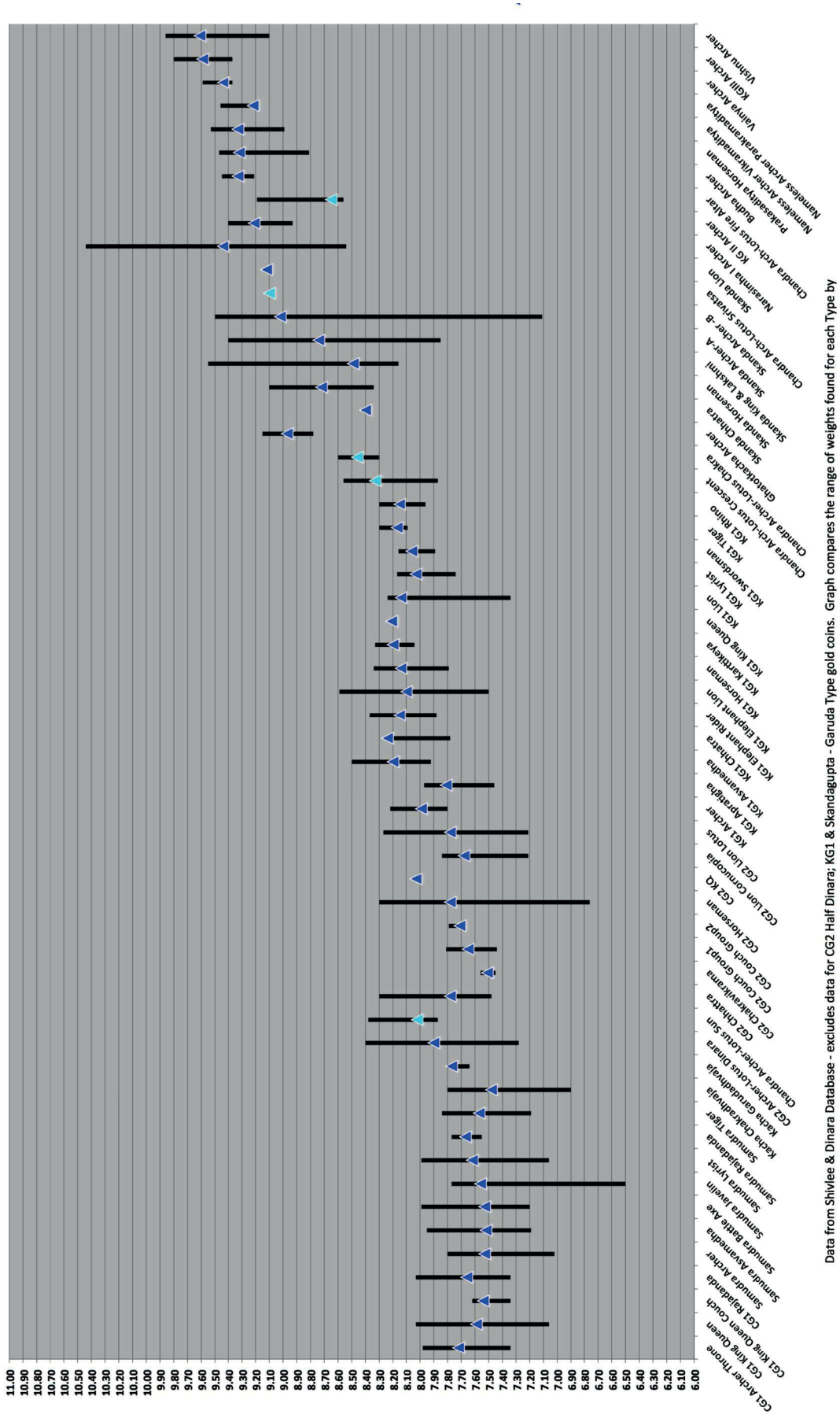


Chart 6.9. Gupta dynasty gold coin weights organized by king and type.

5.7. Fakes in Gupta Coinage

As with any coins perceived to be of high value and in high demand, there are bound to be fake coins that will be marketed to unsuspecting collectors. Here are some examples of the fakes that have come to my attention. Once again, I must caution all to be careful in applying the word "fake" to coins. At times, "top experts" in this field make such statements only to backtrack later once more coins of an unusual style or weight are found in big hoards, proving them wrong.

Fakes can be coins that were meant either to deceive a collector or can even be jeweler copies meant for sale simply as decorative embellishments. When the Bāyāna Hoard was found in 1946 and taken into custody by the *Mahārāja* of Bharatpur, he distributed groups of coins to the various museums around India. He even distributed many of the coins as gifts to his family members and friends. There were so many coins from the Hoard, that he had clasps made to hold them in place (without damaging them) and used them as buttons and cuff links on his blazer (pp. 203, 241, 313, 330). This soon became a fashion statement, and jewelers started making cast copies of other Gupta coins as buttons and cuff links to be worn by the elite at parties and sold as such to the well-off customers who were trying to make a royal statement themselves. Decades later, these same cast coin copies are surfacing and being sold to unsuspecting collectors as real coins.[77]

The surest way to determine if a coin is a fake is to first understand the coinage fully and then work closely with reputable experts or dealers who will guarantee the authenticity. The style, weight, and the fabric of the coin all are key indicators of an original strike. In Gupta coinage, I continue to be surprised by new designs within the same type and variety that show up almost regularly. In the past four decades of studying these coins, every time I think I have a subgroup figured out, I find new die styles and varieties. The point here is that one must not label a new, unique coin design or style which comes to light for the first time, is a fake. The Gupta age was called the Golden Age of lndia for a reason: it was when arts flourished and lead to an expansion of the economy and trade. This was also the time when the Gupta kings minted massive amounts of gold coins. The number of mints is unknown, but what we do know for sure is that the craftsmen at the various mints designing the coin dies were very talented and had a considerable amount of freedom in creating the dies for a specific Type. For example, when we look at the Javelin Type of Samudragupta I or the Archer|Lotus Type coins of Chandragupta II, where the number of known specimens is in the thousands, we see a huge number of designs, all pointing to multiple die engravers, each with their unique design styles.

In the Archer Type coins of Chandragupta II (Goddess Seated on Lotus) or the Horseman Type of Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I, we see some very poor die designs pointing to a mint that was more focused on mass producing large quantities of gold coins rather than concentrating on quality. It is important for the reader to keep in mind that a coin that has a poor or crude design may still be an original issue. Not all Gupta gold coins were beautiful designs. At the end of each of the following sections on coin types, I list the known fakes as a quick reference. With improved technology, new fakes are bound to appear on the market. One hopes that with the information published here, and by creating a comprehensive catalog,

77. David Tronsgard who at one time was running the American Embassy school in the 1960s in Delhi, met the *Mahārāja* of Bharatpur at a dinner party. The *Mahārāja*'s dinner jacket was adorned with five original *Aśvamedha* Type coins from the Bāyāna Hoard, which had been made into buttons. Upon admiring these beautiful coins, the *Mahārāja* gifted these buttons to Tronsgard. Four of these coins were sold at a Glendining auction in late '70s, and one coin was later sold by Tronsgard to the author which is now in the Shivlee Collection (coin **184**, Bāyāna Hoard coin 170).

Figure 6.19. *JNSI* logo prior to 1956 (l.) and a real coin of Chandragupta II. PC, 1151 (r.).

Figure 6.20. *JNSI* logo 1947 and 1956 (l.) and a fake Lion-Slayer coin. PC (r.).

that the reader is able to get a very good sense of the coin types and varieties in order to distinguish between a real coin and a forgery. In most cases, these fakes are cast copies made from an original gold coin. Cast coins have a different fabric than coins struck by a die and can be easily spotted. On coins where it is difficult to spot, XRF metal analysis is also an excellent way to further investigate this issue.

Coins of the Lion-Slayer Type of Chandragupta II have been a favorite among collectors. When the first issues of the *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* (*JNSI*) rolled off the presses, the eminent numismatists of that time chose the Chandragupta II, Lion-Slayer coin design for their logo. This *JNSI* logo stayed in place on all issues up to 1955 *(JSNI* XVII) at which time, for whatever reason, the logo changed to a new line drawing of a Lion-Slayer design, which first had briefly appeared on a 1947 issue.

I list this example above to show how market forces will cater to the needs of market demands. Very soon afterwards, this design that was on the cover of the most respected *Journal on Indian Numismatics* in India became the source of inspiration using this "newly" drawn coin design, and a die was made and coins struck to match this design—most probably to be sold as a souvenir. Today, the few specimens that have survived over the past 65 years are showing up in the market as the "new and rare" variety of the Lion-Slayer Type.

By looking at the first coin above, even a novice collector of Gupta coins will be able to see a major difference in the design styles. But sometimes the fake coins are not as blatantly obvious, especially coins that may have been cast using the original coins or new dies made to closely resemble original coins, these are mostly very difficult to confirm. The coin below was being sold to collectors in India in 2015—it is a copy of one of the rarest coins of Kumāragupta I —the *Apratigha* Type struck from a new die and is quite a good copy of the original design. It was good enough to be bought by a novice collector who has it today in their collection, no doubt under the impression that it is a genuine coin.

In the past decades, prior to the availability of digital photography, it was a common practice by dealers and museums to make plaster casts of coins for scholars and researchers to review the coin details later. While reviewing papers written by scholars in the 1940s and 1950s, they often refer to plaster casts of a coin sent by a museum for clarifying legends. It is possible that some of these plaster casts eventually led to cast copies of the coins being made.

In excavations at Sunet, Punjāb, as well as at Nālandā, terracotta molds with impressions for Kuṣāṇa and Gupta dynasty coins have been found. Since the gold dīnāras were always die-struck, the only explanation for these terracotta moulds to exist, could be for the use of making cast copies using debased gold at a profit. Frequently we also see silver copies of the gold dīnāra coins show up in the market. These are no doubt copies of the original gold coins cast in silver with gold plating. At one point, these were sold in trade as the original gold coins. The diameter of these coins tends to be in the same range as the gold coins, but the weights of these silver coins are usually in the range of 4–5.5 g (versus the gold dīnāra coins struck on a flan size of 18–22 mm, which tend to be in the 7–8 g range) because of the lower density of the silver versus gold. Cast silver coins in same size tend to be lighter. Size and weights are a good way to distinguish between the two.

I have attempted to add the fake coins in each of the section within the book. This should hopefully serve as a good guide for collectors.

APPENDIXES

Appendix I

Tamghās: Monograms or Guild Symbols

A series of geometric symbols are seen on the reverse of the gold coins of the Gupta kings. These symbols are referred to as *tamghās*. No such *tamghās* are seen on any Gupta copper, lead, or silver coins. These *tamghās* were a carryover from the Kushana gold coin design. Kushana mints used *tamghās* that were peculiar to each king.[1]

KUSANAS

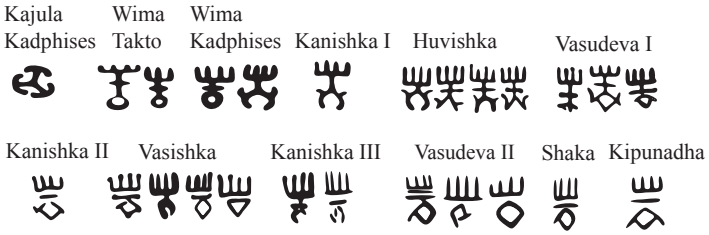


Figure 1. Wima Kadphises. 8.05 g, 21 mm. PC.

Figure 2. Huvishka. 7.94 g. 21 mm. PC.

KUSANO-SASANIAN

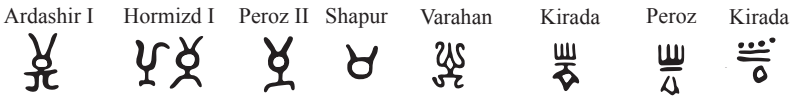


Figure 3. Kirada, CNG 550-338, 7.79 g, 19 mm.

We do not see such specificity in Gupta coins. These *tamghā* are often referred to as monograms or dynastic marks when used on coins. The term *tamghā* referred to an emblem of a particular tribe, clan, or family, mostly in use with the Eurasian nomadic tribes. The *tamghās* were used on their coins as well as seals.

1. Jongeward and Cribb 2015: 305–06.

Guptas

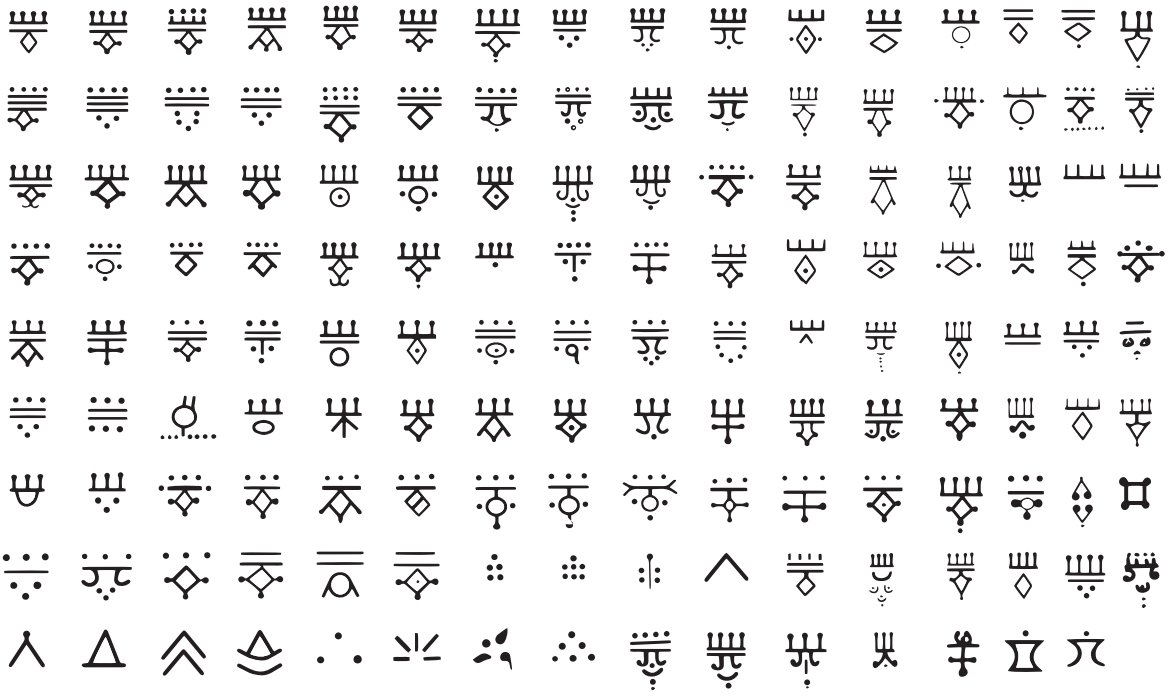


Figure 4. Gold coin of Chandragupta II, *Chhatra* Type.
PC, 1119. The arrow indicates the *tamghā*.

Not all Gupta gold coins have a *tamghā*. It has also not been possible to conclusively link these symbols to individual die designs or die carvers or craftsmen, because the same symbols are used across reigns of multiple Gupta kings over hundreds of years. One craftsman using a specific symbol could not have lived that long. Scholars have spent much time trying to propose various theories regarding what these symbols represent, ranging from mint marks to a form of maintaining a count of the total coins struck. None of these theories proposed so far have been very convincing.

Alchon Hūṇas

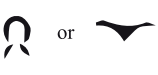
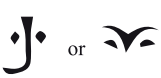
Only one *tamghā* was used by the Hūṇa kings Khingila, Javuka, Mehama, Toraman, and Mihirakula

Figure 5. Alchon Huns, Khingila
AD 440–490, Album 35-746
3.27 g, 27 mm.

On Gupta gold coins, these symbols may have been tied to guilds representing groups of craftsmen that followed specific design styles, as we do find groups of coins within varieties that display similar symbols, but this is not yet confirmed conclusively.

Appendix II

List of Brāhmī Letters and Numbers

Devanāgarī	Phonetic Sound	3rd Century B.C.	2nd to 1st Century B.C.	1st Century A.D.	2nd Century A.D.	5th Century A.D.
अ	a					
आ	á					
इ	i					
ई	ī					
उ	u					
ऊ	ú					
ऋ	rĭ					
ए	ae					
ऐ	ai					
ओ	o					
औ	au					
अं	aṁ					
अः	aha					
क	ka					
का	ká					

Devanāgarī	Phonetic Sound	3rd Century B.C.	2nd to 1st Century B.C.	1st Century A.D.	2nd Century A.D.	5th Century A.D.
ख	kha					
कृ	krĭ					
ग	ga					
गि	gi					
घ	gha					
घी	ghī					
च	cha					
छ	chha					
चु	chu					
छू	chhú					
ज	ja					
झ	jha					
ञ	ñya					
ट	ṭa					
ठ	thh					

Devanāgarī	Phonetic Sound	3rd Century B.C.	2nd to 1st Century B.C.	1st Century A.D.	2nd Century A.D.	5th Century A.D.
ड	ḍa					
ढ	ḍha					
ण	ṇa					
त	ta					
थ	tha					
द	da					
ध	dh					
ङ	ṇa					
न	na					
प	pa					
फ	pha					
ब	ba					
भ	bha					
म	ma					
मो	mo					

Devanāgarī	Phonetic Sound	3rd Century B.C.	2nd to 1st Century B.C.	1st Century A.D.	2nd Century A.D.	5th Century A.D.
र	ra					
ल	la					
व	va					
ह	ha					
स	sa					
श	ṣa					
ष	sha					
स्य	sya					
य	ya					
श्री	Śrī					

BRAHMI NUMERALS USED ON GUPTA AND KSHATRAPA COINS

UNITS	
1	
2	
3	or
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
0	Was not used

TENS	
10	
20	
30	
40	
50	
60	
70	
80	
90	

HUNDREDS	
100	
200	
300	

Śaka Era Year 1 = AD 78
Gupta Era Year 1 = AD 319

Dates on coins are usually preceded by *Varshe (year) or just Va.*

Varshe 80 + 1 = Gupta Era 81
GE 81 + 319 = AD 400

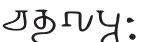
Va 100 + 10 + 5 = 115
GE 115 + 319 = AD 434

Dates from inscriptions and coins are assumed to have used current year 1 = AD 319, Instead of elapsed or expired year.

Appendix III

List of Brāhmī Legends

Chandragupta

1. 
Chandraguptaḥ

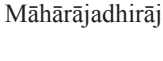
2.
Śrī-Kumāradevī

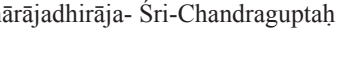
3.
Lichchhavaḥ

4.
Deva śri Mahārājādhirāja-Śri-Chandraguptaḥ

5.
Māhārājadhirāja- Śri-Chandraguptaḥ

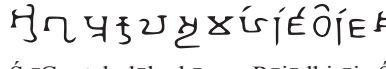
6.
Devaśrimahārājādhirāja-śri-Chandraguptasya

7. 
Rūpākṛitī

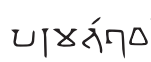
8. 
Paramabhagavata [śrī] Chandraguptaḥ

9.
Paramabhāgavata Mahārājādhirāja-śrī- Chandragupta Vikramādityaḥ

10.
ŚrīGuptakulālankārsya Rājādhirāja Śrī-Chandragupta Vikramānkasya

11. 
Devaśrimahārājādhirāja-śri-Chandraguptaḥ

12.
Paramabhāgavato Mahārājādhirāja-śrī-Chandraguptaḥ

13. 
Śrī Vikramaḥ

14.
Vikramādityaḥ

15.
Chakravikramaḥ

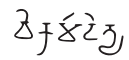
16.
Ajitavikkramaḥ

17.
Siṁhavikramaḥ

18.
Chandragupta

19.
Śrī Chandradityaḥ

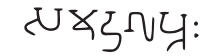
20.
Kshitimavajitya sucharitairdiavaṁ jayati Vikramādityaḥ

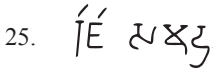
21. 
Vikramādityaḥ

22.
Narendrachandrandraḥ prathitaraṇo raṇe jayatyajayyo bhuvi siṁhavikramaḥ

23.
Narendrasiṁha Chandraguptaḥ pṛithivīṁ vijitya divaṁ jayati

Samudragupta

24. 
Samudraguptaḥ

25. 
Rājā Samudraguptaḥ

26.
Parākramaḥ

27.
Mahārājādhirājaḥ Śrī-Samudraguptaḥ

28.
Kṛitāntaparaśuḥ

29.
Rājādhirājaḥ pṛithivīmatitvā divaṁ jayatyāhṛitavājimedhaḥ

30.
Vyāghraparākkaramaḥ

31.
Rājādhirājaḥ pṛithivīṁ vijitya divaṁ jayatyāhṛitavājimedhaḥ

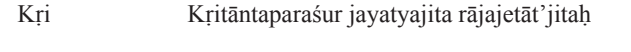
32.
Aśvamedhaparākramaḥ

33.
Hayamedháparākramaḥ

34.
Kṛi

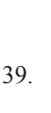
35.
Kṛitāntaparaśur jayatyajita rājajetāt'jitaḥ

36.
Apratiratho vijitya kshitimavanīśo divaṁ jayati

37. 
Apratiratho vijitya kshitiṁ sucharitair divaṁ jayati

Ramagupta - Kachagupta

38.
Rāmaguptaḥ

39. 
Kācha

40.
Kācho gām avajitya dyām karamabhir uttamair jayati

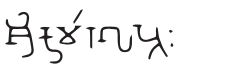
41.
Sarvarājochchhettā

Kumaragupta

42.
Kumāra

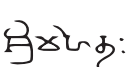
43.
Kumāraguptaḥ

44.
Guptaḥ Kumāra

45. 
Śrī-Kumāraguptaḥ

46.
Kumāragupto'dhirājaḥ

47.
Apratigah

48. 
Śrī Vikramaḥ

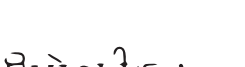
49.
Śrīmahendrakumāraḥ

50.
Śrī Mahendrādityaḥ

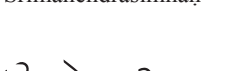
51.
Śrī-aśvamedhamahendraḥ

52.
Śrīmahendragajaḥ

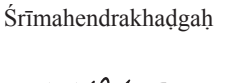
53.
Siṁhamahendraḥ

54. 
Śrīmahendrasiṁhaḥ

55.
Siṁhanihantā mahendragajaḥ

56. 
Śrīmahendrakhaḍgaḥ

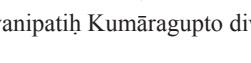
57.
Mahārājādhirājā śrī-Kumāraguptaḥ

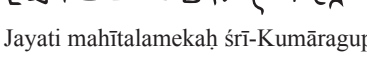
58. 
Mahārājādhirājaśrī-Kumāraguptaḥ

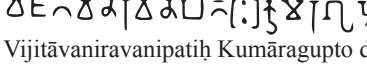
59.
Mahārājādhirāja śrī -Kumāragupta Kramādityaḥ

60.
Vijitāvaniravanipatiḥ Kumāragupto divaṁ jayati

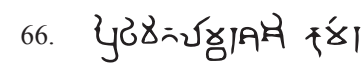
61.
Jayati mahītalamekaḥ śrī-Kumāraguptaḥ sudhanvī

62. 
Paramarājādhirāja-śrī-Kumāraguptaḥ

63. 
Vijitāvaniravanipatiḥ Kumāragupto divaṁ jayati

64. 
Paramabhāgavata mahārājādhirāja-śrī- Kumāragupta-Mahendrādityaḥ

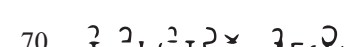
65.
Paramabhāgavata rājādhirāja śrī Kumāragupta Mahendrādityaḥ

66. 
Pṛithvītalāmbaraśaśī Kumāragupto jayatyajitaḥ

67.
Jayati nṛipo'ribhirajitaḥ

68.
Kshitipatirajito vijayī Kumāragupto divaṁ jayati

69.
Guptakulavyomaśaśī jayatyajeyo jitamahendraḥ

70. 
Kshitipatirajito vijayī Kumāragupto jayatyajitaḥ

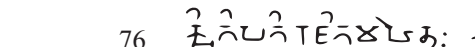
71.
Guptakulāmalachandro Mahendrakarmā'jito jayati

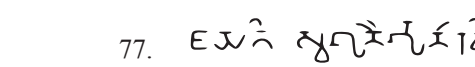
72.
Pṛithivītaleśvarendraḥ Kumāragupto jayatyajitaḥ

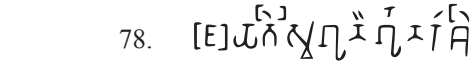
73.
Kumāragupto vijayi sinhamahendro divaṁ jayati

74.
Sākśhādiva narasiṁhaḥ siṁhamahendro jayatyaniśaṁ

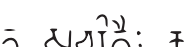
75.
Kumārgupto yudhi siṁhavikramaḥ

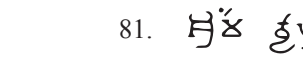
76. 
Kshitipatirajita mahendraḥ Kumāragupto divaṁ jayati

77. 
GB: Jayati svaguṇair guṇārasir Vrtanihantr Mahendraḥkumāraḥ

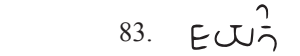
78. 
Jayati svaguṇair guṇaraśir Vṛtanihantra Mahendrakumāraḥ

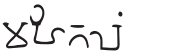
79.
Gāmavijitya sucharitaiḥ Kumāragupto divaṁ jayati

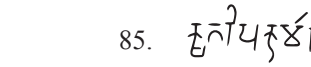
80. 
Guṇeśo mahītalaṁ jayati Kumāraḥ

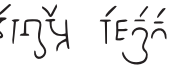
81. 
Śrīmāṁ vygāhrabalaparākramaḥ

82.
Bharta khaḍgatrātā Kumāragupto jayatyaniśaṁ

83. 
Jayati mahītalaṁ

84. 
Devo jitaśatruḥ Kumāragupto’dhirājā

85. 
KshataripuKumāragupto rājatrātā jayati ripūn

86. 
Guṇeśo mahītalaṁ

Skandagupta

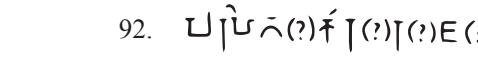
87.
Śrī Skandaguptaḥ

88.
Paramabhāgavata śrī Skandaguptaḥ

89.
Paramabhāgavata śrī Vikramāditya Skandaguptaḥ

90.
Paramabhāgavata mahārājādhirāja Skandagupta Kramādityaḥ

91.
Kramādityaḥ

92. 
Parahitakārī rājā jayati divaṁ śrī-Kramādityaḥ

93.
Jayati mahītalaṁ Skandhaguptaḥ sudhanvī

94.
Paramabhāgavata śrī Skandagupta Kramādityaḥ

95.
Vijitāvaniravanipati[ḥ] śrī Skandagupto divaṁ jayati

96.
Vijitāvaniravanipatir jayati divaṁ Skandagupto 'yaṁ

97.
Śrī Kramādityasya

98.
Ajita Kramāditya

99.
Budha

100.
Vijitāvaniravanipati[ḥ] śrī-Budhagupto divaṁ jayati

101.
Śrī Vikramaḥ

102.
Vijitya vasudhāṁ divaṁ jayati

103.
Para.....śrī Dvadaśādityaḥ

104.
Śrī Prakāśādityaḥ

105.
Ghaṭo

106.
Kramādityaḥ

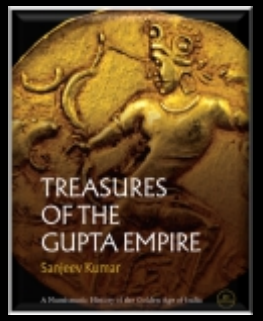
107.
Bālādityaḥ

108.
Nara

109.
Vainya

110.
Vishṇu

Go Gre Ja Jā Bha Bhā Ru Si



Gold coins of Kings of Gupta Dynasty गुप्तवंश के राजाओं के सोने के सिक्के (सुवर्ण-मुद्रायें)

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This is a quick reference guide for collectors to identify gold coins quickly. Each type shown below may also have many varieties (different designs to show the same scene) and were issued by different kings. All Gupta Kings used the Archer design, but some kings introduced new coin designs, or repeated earlier designs issued by by their father or grandfather with new design changes. Studying and collecting all the different variations helps us to understand history better. The obverse and reverse of each coin type is shown below.

यह संग्राहकों के लिए सोने के सिक्कों की तुरंत पहचान करने के लिए एक त्वरित संदर्भ मार्गदर्शिका है। नीचे दिखाए गए प्रत्येक प्रकार की कई किस्में हो सकती हैं (एक ही दृश्य दिखाने के लिए अलग-अलग डिज़ाइन) पर विभिन्न राजाओं द्वारा जारी किए गए थे। धनुषधारी(आर्चर) रूपांकन का उपयोग सभी गुप्त राजाओं द्वारा किया गया था, लेकिन कुछ राजाओं ने नए सिक्कों के डिज़ाइन पेश किए, या नए डिज़ाइन परिवर्तनों के साथ अपने पिता या दादा द्वारा जारी किए गए पुराने डिज़ाइनों को दोहराया। सभी विभिन्न विविधताओं का अध्ययन और संग्रह करने से हमें इतिहास को बेहतर ढंग से समझने में मदद मिलती है। प्रत्येक सिक्के के प्रकार का अग्र और पृष्ठ नीचे दिखाया गया है।

Chandragupta I चंद्रगुप्त प्रथम — King Queen on Couch Type पर्यंक पर राजा रानी प्रकार

Chandragupta I 319-343AD चंद्रगुप्त प्रथम — Couch Type पर्यंक प्रकार

Chandragupta II 383-412AD चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय — Couch Type पर्यंक प्रकार

Samudragupta I 344-378AD समुद्रगुप्त प्रथम — King Queen Type राजा-रानी प्रकार

Chandragupta I चंद्रगुप्त प्रथम — Rajadanda Type राज-दंड प्रकार

Chandragupta I चंद्रगुप्त प्रथम — Archer Type - bow & arrow Goddess seated on throne धनुषधारी प्रकार - धनुष और बाण सिंहासन पर देवी

Chandragupta II चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय — Archer Type - Havan Kund Goddess seated on Lotus धनुषधारी प्रकार - हवन कुंड कमलासन पर देवी

Chandragupta II चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय — Archer Type - Quiver धनुषधारी प्रकार - तूणीर कमलासन पर देवी

Chandragupta II चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय — Archer Type - bow & arrow धनुषधारी प्रकार - धनुष और बाण कमलासन पर देवी

Samudragupta I समुद्रगुप्त प्रथम — Battle Axe Type परशु प्रकार

Samudragupta I समुद्रगुप्त प्रथम — Javelin Type भिण्डिपाल प्रकार

Samudragupta I समुद्रगुप्त प्रथम — Asvamedha Type अश्वमेध प्रकार

Gold coins of Kings of Gupta Dynasty गुप्तवंश के राजाओं के सोने के सिक्के (सुवर्ण-मुद्रायें)

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Samudragupta I 344-378AD
समुद्रगुप्त प्रथम

Lyrist Type
वीणा प्रकार

Samudragupta I Tiger Slayer Type - Goddess Ganga
समुद्रगुप्त प्रथम
व्याघ्र-निहन्ता प्रकार - देवी गंगा

Ramagupta-Kachagupta
रामगुप्त-काचगुप्त

Chakradhavaja Type
चक्रध्वज प्रकार

Chandragupta II
चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय

Chakravikrama Type
चक्रविक्रम प्रकार

Chandragupta II
चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय

Chhatra Type
छत्र प्रकार

Chandragupta II
चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय

Horseman Type
अश्वारोही प्रकार

Chandragupta II
चंद्रगुप्त द्वितीय

Lion Slayer Type
सिंह-निहन्ता प्रकार

Kumāragupta I
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Apratigha Type
अप्रतिघ प्रकार

Kumāragupta I
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Elephant Rider Type
हाथी सवार प्रकार

Kumāragupta I
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Elephant Rider Lion Slayer type
गजारोही सिंह निहन्ता

Kumāragupta I
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Garuda Type
गरुड प्रकार

Kumāragupta I 409-452AD
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Kartikeya Type
कार्तिकेय प्रकार

Kumāragupta I
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Rhinoceros Slayer Type
गैंडा शिकारी प्रकार

Kumāragupta I
कुमाररगुप्त प्रथम

Swordsman Type
असि-धारी प्रकार

Skandagupta
सकन्दगुप्त
449-468AD

King & Lakshmi Type
राजा-रानी एवं लक्ष्मी प्रकार

Prakāśaditya
प्रकाशादित्य
496AD

Horseman Lion Slayer Type
अश्वारोही सिंह-निहन्ता

Abbreviations

AJC	Ajit Ghose Collection
AKC	Anil Kanodia Collection
Album	Steve Album
ANS	American Numismatic Society
ASC	Ashok Singh Collection
Ashmolean	Ashmolean Museum
Baldwin	Baldwin's Auctions
Berlin	Berlin State Museums
BH	Bayana Hoard
BhM	State Museum, Bhopal
BKB	Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum
BM	British Museum
BM IOC	India Office Collection at the British Museum
Boston	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
BSM	Bihar Museum, Bihar
CC	Chand Collection
CI	Coin India
CNG	Classical Numismatic Group
CNGI	Classical Numismatic Gallery India
Gemini	Gemini Numismatic Auctions
GMC	Madras Museum
Goldberg	Ira & Larry Goldberg Auctions
GSC	Girish Sharma Collection
Hermitage	The State Hermitage Museum
HK	HK Auction
IMK	Indian Museum, Kolkata
KSC	Karan Singh Collection
Kunker	Kunker Numismatics
LACMA	Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Lahore	Lahore Museum
Lucknow	State Museum Lucknow
Maru	Maru Auction
Mathurā	Government Museum, Mathurā
MC	Maheswari Collection
MGM	MGM Museum, Raipur
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art

MSC	Mitresh Singh Collection
NAC	Numismatic Art Gallery
NGR	Nicholas Rhodes
NM	National Museum Delhi
NNC	N. Nasir Collection
Oswal	Oswal Antiques
Pars	Pars Coins
PC	Private Collection
PM	Patna Museum
PTC	Pankaj Tandon Collection
Rajasthan	Rajasthan Museum Jaipur
Roma	Roma Numismatics
Sārnāth	Sārnāth Museum
SKC	Skanda Collection
SNKC	S. N. Karthik Collection
Spink	Spink & Son
Stack's	Stack's Bowers
Tody	Tody Auction
Triton	Triton Auction CNG
UBS	UBS Group AG
Virasat	Virasat Auctions
Zeno	Zeno.ru

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